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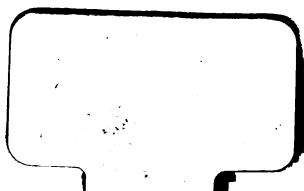
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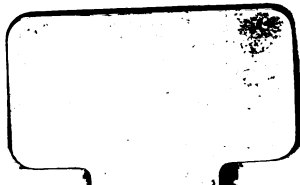


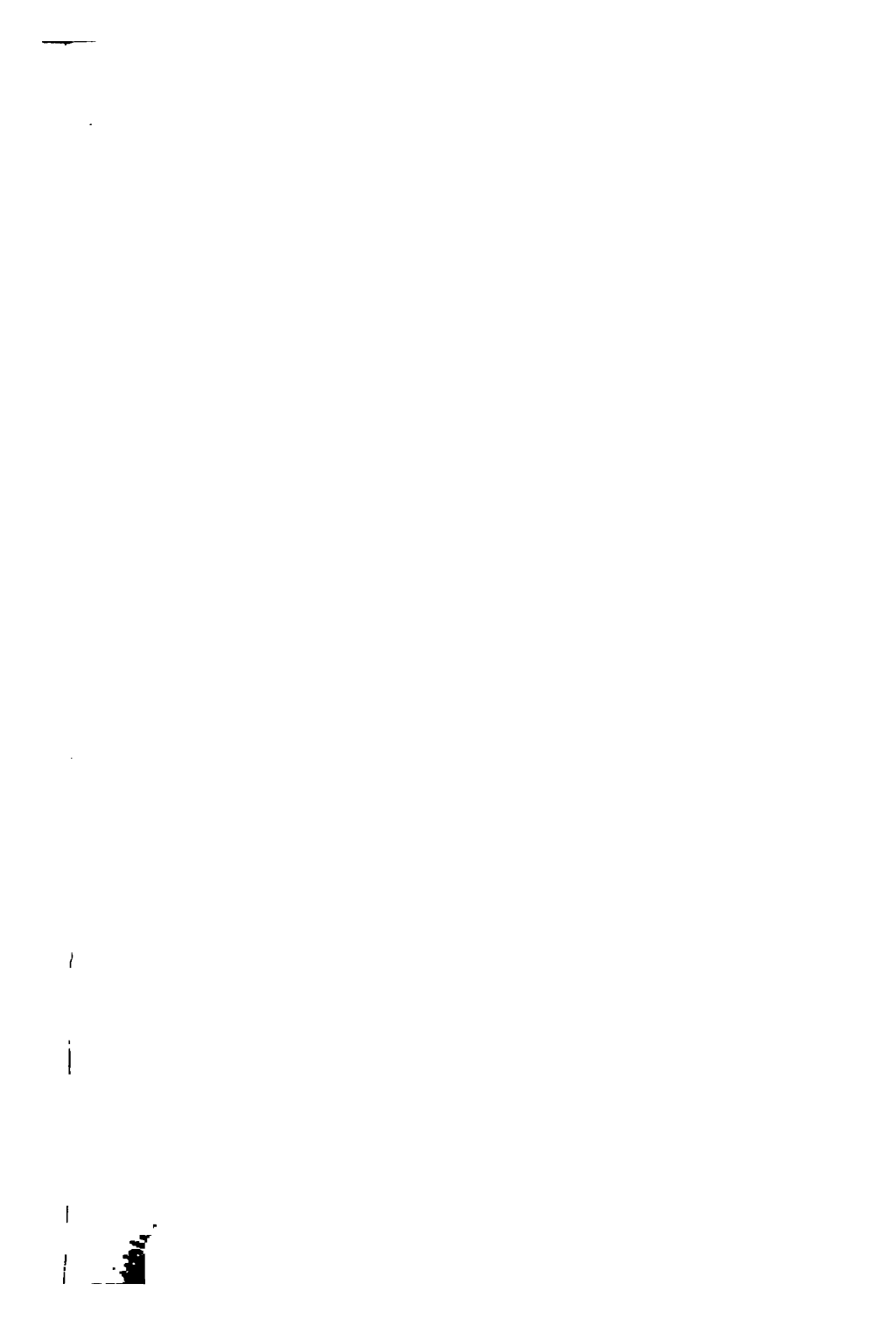
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THE FORTUNES
OF
MAURICE CRONIN.

VOL. III.

THE FORTUNES OF
MAURICE CRONIN.

A Novel.

BY
M. L. KENNY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.

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THE FORTUNES
OF
MAURICE CRONIN.

CHAPTER I.

IN shaping his course in the first instance for Deverell, the doctor's intention was to make to Sir Hugh a point blank statement of what had passed between his daughter and James Cronin; and, having thus put him on his guard, to hasten on to Glenmore House, where, as the hour for the funeral was now approaching, he concluded he should find Cronin, and, in fulfilment of his promise to May, endeavour by all possible arguments and concessions, to dissuade him from carrying out his threats.

Had any alternative been at hand he would gladly have grasped at it; for of all painful tasks that fate could have thrust upon him, that of being compelled personally to disclose to this man, who, notwithstanding some lingering remains of early prejudice, notwithstanding his frank distaste to the narrow-mindedness which is at once the

root and the result of overweening pride, had yet won to no small amount on his sympathy and esteem—the task of having to announce to him, that his long-concealed guilt was at last about to be made manifest, was the most repugnant.

But it had needed no reflection to convince him, that at a juncture like this, when all lay at the mercy of such a dastard tongue as Cronin's, when any day, any hour might bring Wylde back upon the scene, to confront the wrong-doer with his victim, reticence was but another name for cowardice; that true manliness, true charity and friendship, was to tell his tale without delay, and so place the unhappy man in a position to defend himself, if self-defence were possible; at worst, to afford him time to shun by flight the dangers that now assailed him on every side.

'At any cost we must screen him for his children's sake,' soliloquized the doctor, 'although, if my darkest surmise have hit the truth, and that this wretched hound can prove it so, it may be that he is a doomed man already; that utter ruin must come upon him, in spite of all that we can do.'

That Sir Hugh already *was* a doomed man the doctor inly concluded, when, in answer to his demand to see him, word was brought that he was just then occupied with Mr Cronin, and begged to be excused for a short time.

'Mr Cronin! You do not mean to say that he is here so soon?'

Mr Jenkins, the butler, which grave functionary

had in person borne his master's message, looked mysterious.

'He has been here all night, sir. He was here great part of yesterday, and in the evening, a little after seven, he went out with Miss May; and we saw no more of him until about ten, when he tore into the place like mad, and made straight for the study, where the master was sitting writing. I followed, seeing the state he was in, and was for offering to help; but the master said I was not wanted, for that he could manage to pacify him himself. I could see that he was very angry and put out, for when I asked him hadn't I better go look after Miss May, he said, speaking very sharp for *him*, for me to mind my own business, and to lock up the house for the night, for that Miss May was not coming home.'

'You need not be uneasy about Miss May, Jenkins. She stayed the night with Mrs Cronin at the Tower. She is all right.'

'I am glad to hear it, sir, for I *was* uneasy, knowing the company she had gone out in. If Mr Percy had been at home I would not have minded, for no one could say against him going to look after her; but I had to obey orders and keep at home.'

'Mr Percy absent also, is he?'

'Stopped the night at Admiral Cronin's, sir. But there is that German man, Mr Krantz, limping past the window. The master will be with you now in a minute, sir, for he was only waiting for him to go up.'

The doctor had but scant time to assimilate this added item of intelligence, the bearing of which upon his own conduct, he could yet hardly see; for the door had not long closed on Mr Jenkins' exit, when it again opened to admit Sir Hugh.

'You are indeed the "friend in need," doctor,' he began, advancing quickly to the window by which his visitor had stationed himself; 'I was in the act of writing to ask you to——'

He stopped short, involuntarily drawing back his outstretched hand, as the doctor turned and faced him; his frank countenance visibly overcast, with the cloud of mingled trouble, anxiety, and suspicion, which he had neither skill nor inclination just then to endeavour to dispel.

'James Cronin is here, Sir Hugh?'

'He is.'

'Can I see him?'

There was a momentary pause.

'I do not think that he needs your services. The man is on the verge of delirium, and simply requires to be watched. Unfortunately I have had my share of experience of such cases, and feel as competent to deal with them as anyone. It would be no friendly act to permit strangers to hear his ramblings, knowing, as I do, that he might betray many things that he is anxious to conceal; and, therefore, I mean to entrust him to no hands but my own.'

'Who is with him now?'

Sir Hugh frowned, a mere passing indication

of displeasure, for the next instant his brow cleared, and he broke into a laugh.

‘A person thoroughly well qualified for the charge, believe me. I chanced while in London to fall in with a rather eccentric person, a man with a hobby, a German, named Krantz; and I brought him back with me, that I might hear him ventilate his theories at my leisure. He is a stout-built fellow, able for two men like Mr Cronin; and luckily, too, he is quite deaf, so can make no awkward discoveries, let the other rave as he may. I have pressed him into the service for the time.’

It was in a painfully dubious state of mind, that the doctor listened to this elaborately careless reply.

Was it possible that any man in whose past lurked a darksome secret, which he had not scrupled to preserve even at the cost of blood; was it credible that such a one could speak coolly, nay, jestingly, at a crisis when fame and fortune, and it might be life itself, too, were trembling in the balance?

Was it not far more Christian-like, more natural too, to assume that May, nervous and overwrought, that he himself, vivid enough of temperament, and endued, though ever so slightly, with human nature’s tendency to ‘think the worst’ on the meagrest provocation thereunto; was it not better and easier far, to believe that they had been misled by the ravings of incipient madness, than that this gentleman of honour,

unstained and unsuspected, was a monster not to be ranked among his fellow-men? a murderer, a traitor of the blackest dye?

Had any one been at hand to whom the 'human face divine' was less of a sealed book, than it oft-times is to nine-tenths of the unseeing eyes that gaze upon it, the two faces thus strikingly brought into contrast had presented a study, unequalled for the keen interest it must excite.

As it was, one, and that one at the moment the more tell-tale, eluded observation, for, absorbed in his heavy thoughts, the doctor's eyes were turned towards the window.—What was there in the aspect of the glowing scene that stretched before them, that should bear back upon him with resistless force the doubt he was struggling manfully to expel? should whisper that for such fair heritage as this, for the name, and honour that went with it, many a man had ere now stained his soul with kindred blood?—Nor was it, until recalled to consciousness by feeling that Sir Hugh was intently regarding him, that he came back to the business of the hour with an impatient sigh:—

'You said that you were in the act of writing to me, Sir Hugh. May I inquire about what?'

'To ask you to inform Admiral Cronin of the state of affairs here, and to request him to excuse me. Percy is there to represent me, so he cannot accuse me of failing in respect to my old friend; and as to Mr Cronin, I do not think that his absence will be deemed a loss. Your arrival

is as opportune as it was unexpected. I should have thought that you would be at Glenmore, 'ere this.'

'I come from the Tower, where I have left them all in great distress, owing to a fresh attack of illness to Mrs Cronin. *Apropos*, Sir Hugh, they will take it as a great kindness if you will spare May to them for a few days. She herself wishes it, and I promised——'

He paused a moment, unwilling to utter a falsehood; then remembering that since he must needs postpone for the present all inquiries, Sir Hugh being obviously bent on barring his approach to the individual alone competent to satisfy them, it was necessary to account for his unlooked-for presence, went on:—

'I promised to take the Chase on my way, and obtain your permission for her to remain. Now that I *am* here, Sir Hugh, I confess I should wish to see James Cronin. I *must* communicate with him personally, no matter what his state, before night; and why not now as well as later on? Surely there are no secrets in his past life, which it would be unsafe to entrust to *me*?'

Sir Hugh bit his lip:—

'There are secrets, Doctor Egan; not that it would be *unsafe* to entrust to you, but that the holder might well be reluctant to part with to any one. No further back than yesterday he disclosed to me circumstances, a circumstance rather, which he would have cut his tongue out before he would make known to another. Really,

sir, it seems to me as if you doubted my capability to——’

‘Enough, Sir Hugh, enough! What I have to say, can as well be said after the funeral, by which time you will, I am sure, see the expediency of affording me access to him. At present, indeed, I could not well delay. I should have been on my way to Glenmore long before this.’

‘Nay, you must spare time to breakfast with me, even if they have to wait for you. Pardon me if I was a little hasty, doctor; but really those Messieurs Cronin, father and son, have so tried my patience of late, that I begin to tire of the sound of the name.’

‘Thanks; I have breakfasted already. I must be off.’

‘One word, please! What of Maurice Cronin? Has he come to his reason, and consented to go to Glenmore?’

‘He has not. He will never go.’

‘He is standing in his own light. His father is bent on making reparation, if he will but let him. As a proof of this I need but tell you, that he has proposed to me——’

Here Sir Hugh’s voice took a certain icy intonation that, involuntarily it may be, it assumed when the theme under discussion was one that trenched in any sort on his pride——

‘To bring about an alliance between his son and my daughter, who, as he seems at first glance to have discerned, have, unsuspected by me, contracted an attachment to one another. He has

actually arranged all this with me, conditional on my effecting a reconciliation with his son.'

The doctor shivered in spite of himself.

Truly, poor Martha had kept her secret well! had guarded with fatal success, every opening through which the father could obtain knowledge of the existence of his child!

'I might as well talk to the winds, Sir Hugh. He will not go.'

'We need say no more then. Stay! will you oblige me by conveying this packet to Percy, and directing him to proceed to Dublin immediately after the funeral, and place it himself in the hands of my solicitor, Mr Slade. I was not aware until last night's post, that it was required in haste; and now I find it is all-important that it should reach town by to-morrow. I have not time to write to Percy; but pray tell him from me that I wish him to remain in Dublin so long as Mr Slade may need his assistance.'

And at last, after some few words more, the doctor had shaken himself free of the presence, that within those last few minutes had begun to feel singularly oppressive; and rejecting the proffered accommodation of a carriage, had mounted, and was soon spurring at a rapid pace along the road to Glenmore.

The afternoon was already on the wane, when, the stately funeral ceremonial being ended, he found an opportunity of speaking to Percy Grace, and delivering Sir Hugh's message.

'If you post across to E—— without delay,

you will be in good time to catch the half-five train to Dublin, Percy. Do not neglect it, for your father said that the matter was all-important; he impressed it on me, to urge you not to fail to reach town to-night.'

Percy's countenance fell.

'Start for Dublin to-night! and I had just been planning to walk over to the Tower, to ask for Mrs Cronin. It is more than three days since I saw—Maurice, and I wished particularly to speak to him to-night.'

They were standing on the drive in front of Glenmore House, by the side of the carriage from which the young man had just alighted; and into which it was the doctor's purpose that he should forthwith re-enter, doubtful as he was, yet awhile, as to how far it was expedient that Sir Hugh's son should be made acquainted with what had passed.

It might be, he had argued with himself, that they would not find it feasible, much less wise, to conceal from him the terrible complication which Martha's disclosure had brought to light, aware, as he was, of the engagement which that disclosure made so terrible; and, in that view of the case, it had yet to be decided when, and to what extent, he should be informed of the truth. While, on the other hand, it was possible that, to each of the hapless ones involved, the knowledge that he, of all others, was cognizant of the fatal blight that had fallen on them, would but have the effect of infusing new bitterness into the draught,

already well-nigh too bitter to be endured by mortal lips.

'Besides,' thought the doctor, 'Heaven only knows what may transpire within the next day or two, which it would kill this poor lad to learn suddenly, as he would be sure to do were he on the spot.'

He laid a hand on Percy's shoulder.

'The Tower is no place for you to go visiting to-night, for they are all in trouble there, owing to Mrs Cronin having got another attack. I can sympathize with your disappointment at not being able to see *Maurice*'—he strove to speak lightly, fearful in his guilty consciousness, that the deep gravity of his tone had in itself something to excite suspicion—'but the privation need not be for long. You will hardly be absent more than a few days.'

Percy's sensitive face flushed crimson.

'*Who told you, sir?*'

'No matter who told me, since I have found it out. Hurry off now, or you will be late.'

'And have you no word to say to me but that? Do you not care for me enough to be glad at my success. But you think I do not deserve her; you think she is thrown away, on a worthless fellow like me.'

'My lad, I am an old cynic, and have no right to pronounce upon such matters. They tell me that all these things are arranged in Heaven, and so best. Please yourselves, and you please me.'

‘You *do* think it, doctor, but you are wrong. I have been a miserable creature until now; a baby, a dreamer, weighed down all my life by a feeling that there was a doom upon me which it was useless to struggle against, for that it must overtake me soon or late. Ay! you may stare if you will. I never said so much to you before, because nothing ever occurred to rouse me to it; but I say it now, and it is the truth. But that is all at an end for ever. I mean to be no longer a mere sickly ne’er-do well. I mean henceforth to be a man, and not to rest till I have done something to make her proud of me. That is the way to keep hold on a girl like Nina. Make her feel proud of you, and the work is done for life.’

‘Why, Percy, what a fine frenzy you have wrought yourself up to, and all about nothing! Have I ever called you a ne’er-do-well? Have I shown that I thought you other than as good a fellow as ever breathed?’

‘No, no! but I could see that you contrasted me with Maurice, and no wonder. Ah, doctor, all your best sympathies go with him, and I am jealous of him. When he tells you—perhaps he has already done it—that the same happiness has come to him, you will not call yourself an old cynic. You will have a blessing, and a good word, for him and May.’

Again the doctor shivered with an emotion that he could not repress.

A blessing and a good word for those to whom

love had come in the shape of a malediction! of the working out of the Bible doom!

For the second time that day, possibly for the second time since he had cast off pinafores, tears gathered in his eyes.

'I have a blessing and a good word for you, too. I pray God to bless you, and to keep you from evil, and to chase that silly notion from your mind. Now, then, jump in and be off with you, or I will retract in every word.'

Still Percy lingered.

'Do you know, sir, it strikes me, that you and my father have some object for wishing to be rid of me for awhile. This message about my staying in town to help Mr Slade, is all nonsense; for I know no more of law, nor of the business that they are engaged on, than you do. You might as well tell me frankly, has anything occurred that makes me *de trop*?'

'Nothing that I know of.'

Clearly a mendacious star was in the ascendant, and beneath its influence it was vain to struggle in the interests of truth.

'Nothing that I know of, except that the new master of Glenmore has arrived at Deverell in a state bordering on *delirium tremens*, which by no means surprises me, for he was always a notable hand at the brandy bottle. Perhaps Sir Hugh dreads the effect of bad example upon you.'

'In delirium, is he? What a good thing it would be if he would make an end of himself, while he is out of his mind. No one could call it

deliberate suicide, and it would free Mrs Cronin and Maurice of such a horrid incubus. Come now, doctor, you need not look so scandalized. You know that I only speak in jest.'

Not scandalized indeed, but yet gravely shocked and startled the doctor did look; though from a cause far other than distaste to the mistimed levity, to which Percy attributed his change of face.

'In sober earnest, doctor, if he be really in delirium, would he not require closer watching than he is likely to get at the Chase? My father seems to be completely absorbed in business, and there is not a man in the place I would entrust him to except Jenkins, and he is too old for that sort of thing now. Do take him under your own charge, and have him properly attended to. I shall never forget what I felt, the day I saw that wretched young Clinton throw himself from the window of the hotel, in —— street. They often have a tendency that way, I am told; and it would be awful if anything happened to Maurice's father, while in our hands.'

'I was a blockhead not to think of this before; worse than a blockhead! but I shall be in time yet. God bless you for putting the thought into my head. If you were never to do a good act again, you have done one now in suggesting this.'

Waiting only until the young man had driven away, the doctor looked around, and seeing no one at hand to whom to give his orders, for in the absence of any recognized head, the Glenmore establishment had sadly deteriorated, strode off

in the direction of the stables ; with intent himself to saddle his steed, and proceed on his return journey to Deverell, without delay.

The saddle was already in his hand, when a groom hurried up to him:—

‘You’ll never get to mount Leprechaun to-day, sir. He is gone dead lame, and won’t be able to go a mile under you, this month to come.’

‘Lame, is he? Why, how the deuce has that happened? He was blown a trifle, certainly; but there was no sign of lameness on him, when I rode him in here to-day.’

‘He is lame now anyhow, sir; as you may see for yourself with half an eye.’

With half an eye, indeed, the doctor did see it, as the animal was led out into the yard.

‘What is to be done, Tim? You have never a bit of decent horse-flesh here, and I hate driving when I can help it; yet I must reach the Chase forthwith.’

Tim’s eyes sparkled mischievously.

‘You needn’t be going to make little of us, that way, sir. There is Fairy looking like a picture, right forment you this minit; and if she won’t do, there is the bay mare hasn’t got her match in the three counties, to say nothing of—’

‘Tut, man! do you want to murder me? That bay mare of yours would unseat a Cossack, and you know it; and Fairy is not half up to my weight. Can you do nothing better for me than that?’

‘Sorra take the thing else I can think of, sir,

unless you take the horse that Sir Hugh's messenger came on. *It* is up to your weight anyhow, and it is fresh enough still to go twenty mile; the strange man can go back in the gig.'

'Sir Hugh's messenger! Messenger to whom?'

'Lord save us, sir! didn't I think you knew all about him, seein' you in such a hurry? There has been a strange man, a furriner I think he is, waitin' for you for the last half-hour, with a letter from Sir Hugh. I think you are wanted badly, sir; not so much from what he said, for he hasn't got a word of dacent English, but he seemed to be in a mortal fidget for you to come in.'

The doctor's heart stood still.

Was the dark act, which he was idly hasting onward to avert, already consummated?

Had he himself in his coward shrinking from an obvious task, his coward impulse to postpone, even for briefest space, the evil hour of reckoning, had he connived, almost open-eyed, at murder? abandoned this miserable caitiff to the mercy of the man whose victim he was fore-doomed to be, after he had served him as a tool?

He passed his hand across his forehead, on which the cold drops had gathered thickly.

Surely he was not in his right mind, that he should thus rush wildly to a conclusion, which no sane man could, by aid of sober logic, ever reach!

The events of the last dozen hours had shaken him; the burden of those unspoken fears, the shadow of this brooding evil, had so pressed upon him, that he was now as unnerved and phantom-

ridden, as the wretched subject of his waking dream.

‘Where is Sir Hugh’s messenger?’

‘In the little breakfast parlour, sir. We didn’t like to put him into the dining-room, because it is all turned topsy-turvy after the morning; and we thought that the parlour would be the most comfortable place for you to take a bit of lunch, sir, while you are talking to him. You must not go without taking something, doctor. You are looking quite done up as it is.’

Before this hospitable speech had reached its close, the doctor was in-doors, and in presence of the messenger of fate.

Not a very fateful-looking personage; simply Mr Krantz, the German of scientific proclivities, whom Sir Hugh, from a motive of which his letter afforded an explanation, had utilized for the nonce.

As silently as it was proffered to him, the doctor took Sir Hugh’s letter, and opening it, read as follows:—

‘Deverell Chase, half-past two o’clock.

‘DEAR DOCTOR EGAN, I regret extremely that I took on myself the responsibility of preventing you from seeing Mr Cronin when you were here this morning.

‘I thought that I was equal to the task of managing him, which, for the reason I then assigned, I was willing to do in person; but in this I was mistaken, for within the last hour or two he has developed symptoms so unusual, and to my mind so alarming, that I am, though most re-

luctantly, compelled to trouble you to visit him, with all convenient speed.

‘I do not know in what terms to apologize for the grave breach of civility of which I was guilty in excluding you; remembering, as I should have done, that revelations made to gentlemen of your profession are ever held sacred. I can but plead in extenuation, my zeal in behalf of a person, whom, though I do not call him my friend, I yet earnestly desire to rescue from the effects of folly and misconduct; and trust that you will not let my error stand in the way of your serving him in his need.

‘Pray bring with you everything that may be requisite for the case you have to deal with. In May’s absence the medical department here has been terribly neglected; and we are entirely without drugs or appliances of any sort.

‘I send this by my German genius, Krantz, of whom I spoke to you. He has tired very quickly of his post of amateur jailor; and I thought it as well, too, deaf though he is, to have him out of the way, as I have Jenkins at hand to assist me if I require help.

‘As you will have him on the spot, you can oblige me by introducing Krantz to Admiral Cronin, and reminding the Admiral, from me, of his promise to allow him to inspect the Glenmore lands on the first opportunity. This will occupy him for a time, and will keep him out of my way.

‘Trusting to see you before night,

‘Faithfully yours,

H. DEVERELL GRACE.’

‘P.S. I open this to say that Cronin has just calmed down after a violent paroxysm, in the course of which he had called out continuously for you. This makes me doubly regretful for my blunder of the morning, and eager to repair it without delay.’

The doctor’s brow cleared visibly as he carefully read this letter through to the end; his cheek retaining its accustomed ruddy hue, while a glow, part self-reproach, part exultation, banished the chill that had threatened to ice the very marrow in his bones.

It is not easy to be effusive when alone for the first time with the wearer of spectacles, above all of spectacles so portentous and obtrusive as those worn by Mr Krantz; else, despite his grave years, and his graver calling, the doctor had demonstrated, in possibly some highly unprofessional manner, the sensation of intense relief, which he experienced at this plain confutation of his doubts.

Even as it was, though little given to soliloquy, the sensation was too full, and irrepressible, not to find momentary utterance in words.

‘If any man had told me I could be such an ass, I would have laughed at him. To take the idiot ravings of a sot like this as proof against——’

He paused abruptly as his eye fell on the immobile countenance of the individual to whom he was to act as sponsor; then crossing to the

window, he rapidly re-perused Sir Hugh's letter from beginning to end.

Yes, plain as written words could make it, was this frank untutored confutation of the awful doubts that had assailed him; doubts beneath the pressure of which, though but felt so late ago, reason and common sense had been powerless to uphold him; charity had fallen away in evil fashion, which set the great apostle's precept down at nought.

He, even he, practical man and cynical, had accepted the idiot maunderings of a drunkard, the wild imaginings of a creature on the verge of lunacy, as proof irrefutable of the guilt of a man whom no breath of suspicion ever yet had tainted; had stigmatized an honourable gentleman's over-strained punctilio, his chivalrous regard for the feelings of one whom, though not his friend, he was yet eager to snatch from further shame, as portion of a deep-laid plan to screen himself from obloquy; nay, worse than all! had, within the fatuous interval since he had listened to Percy's ill-omened bodings, actually persuaded himself, that only by straining every nerve and muscle could he rescue the unhappy wretch from the snare set for his life.

Yes; within these past twelve bewildered hours, he had actually permitted himself to believe all this! Yet now, here was the unconscious object of his foul suspicions, courteously entreating his good offices for this imaginary victim; craving pardon, as for a breach of minor morals,

for what he had set down as the first step to the perpetration of a crime.

Stifling to a growl any tendency to give other expression to his feelings, he thrust the letter into his pocket, and, advancing to the fireplace, vigorously pulled the bell.

‘Put Leprechaun’s saddle on that horse of Sir Hugh’s, Tim, and have him round in ten minutes; but, first, fetch me writing materials, and provide some one to carry a note for me to the Chase. I am going there myself by-and-by; but I have to go round by my own place, and that will keep me a good three hours later on the road.’

Tim scratched his head dubiously.

‘I don’t think that there is a boy about the place is fit to be loaded with a feather weight, sir. They have all been havin’ a drop, small blame to them after the trouble they’ve gone through; and I don’t think there is one in the house this minute knows his head from his heels, barrin’ myself and the women; and I couldn’t be spared.’

‘That is a pretty state of things truly. I see nothing for it, then, but to press our friend yonder into the service, and Sir Hugh would be better pleased if I would send some one else. Hark ye, Mr Krantz!’

He approached the German, and bent over him, speaking very loud as the sight of the man’s stony face brought to mind Sir Hugh’s mention of his infirmity.

‘Sir Hugh Grace, in his letter, tells me that you wish to see Admiral Cronin, and to be shown

over the lands. I hardly think you will find him in a mood for business to-day, though of course I shall be happy to introduce you; but you can oblige me greatly, and Sir Hugh also, if you will be the bearer of a note from me to the Chase. I would not trespass on you but that I can procure no messenger. Will you do this?’

The German nodded.

‘You understand English, sir, do you not?’

Another nod.

‘Confound the man! is he dumb as well as deaf?’ muttered the doctor. ‘Who could make any sense out of such pantomime as this?’

‘Ask him to step up to the table, sir, and help himself,’ whispered Tim sagaciously. ‘Tell him there is first class beer in the house, if he turns up his nose at wine and whisky. That will soon show whether he has any English or not.’

Mr Krantz’s prompt acceptance of this suggestion, which the doctor repeated in the shrillest *alto* of hospitality, proved that Tim’s test of his skill in tongues was an able one.

‘Now, then, fetch me pen and ink; and meanwhile I will keep our friend here company, for, to tell the truth, I do feel a trifle done up.’

‘Do, sir, and welcome. There’s a ham that will melt in your mouth, and a turkey you can cut into like a leg of mutton, to say nothing of—’

The doctor laid his hand on a squat black bottle that stood flanking the last-named dish, on

which Mr Krantz had already made a formidable onslaught.

‘Tim, Tim, where do you hope to go to when you die? At your old tricks again, after all my pains to reform you into a law-fearing——’

‘Ah, then, where’s the harm, sir! I have a tidy little keg of the same, packed away in the hay-loft, that the brother brought for you more than a week ago; but I hadn’t the time to go with it till now.’

The doctor shook his head; but despite the prohibitory gesture, he filled a tumbler more than two-thirds full with the innocent-looking fluid under discussion, which he diluted sparingly, *very* sparingly, with water, and tasted with much apparent gusto, ere following the example of Mr Krantz.

He had the first tempting morsel of the bird of promise still suspended on his fork, when Tim returned in hot haste.

‘The Admiral wants to say one word to you, sir, before he goes. He is on the step into the carriage, and would come to you himself but for the gouty foot.’

Full twenty minutes had elapsed before the doctor returned, for (in addition to the time lost in wrangling with the Admiral on his delusion, that a will, signed and witnessed in proper form, and bequeathing the estates to *him*, must assuredly exist among the papers of his sister-in-law, would but the presence of her heir afford liberty to search) he had still further delayed by turning

into the small room, more office than study, in which the business of the household was transacted, and had there written his note to Sir Hugh; which he was in the act of folding, when he rejoined Mr Krantz.

No sealing-wax had been procurable in the ill-ordered little office, therefore the letter should go unfastened; but this did not so much matter, as one glance at the German, still seated at the table, among the good things of which he had made fearful havoc, convinced him that he was not likely to pry into its secrets.

'The fellow is half drunk as it is,' thought the doctor, as he applied himself to his interrupted meal, 'but, even should he take a look into it, he could make neither head nor tail of what it means. A line or two of instructions what to do with Cronin till I reach him, and a hint to trust the case rather to the deaf German, than to any sharp-eared Celt. Not much to be made of that.'

Hastily swallowing the contents of his tumbler, which in his pre-occupation he did not notice to have been surreptitiously refilled by Tim, he rose; and, committing the note to Krantz, prepared to start.

'Give him nothing more mettlesome than Fairy under the gig, or he will be out on his head before he turns the corner, Tim. Nay! my good sir,' as Krantz, probably encouraged by his evident approval of the unknown liquid, laid his hand on the black bottle, 'you really must not venture on that. I could not answer for the consequences, if

you were to touch it after taking other drinks.'

He attempted to replace the bottle, but, with semi-drunken gravity, the German still held it in his grasp.

'I must leave him to you, Tim. See that he does not take any more, else you must keep him here all night.'

Possibly not caring to have the charge of another inebriate, Tim came to the rescue on the spot. 'You must not touch it, sir, if you don't want to poison yourself. It's worse than poison, if you dare to mix it with anything else.'

He stretched out his hand to take it, as the German, doubtless startled at this alarming announcement, thrust it towards him. But either the latter in his eagerness was too abrupt, or Tim was too slow; for between them the bottle slid down, and came to the floor with a smart crash.

'Murder! if the black little thief hasn't been and spilled every drop,' ejaculated Tim in dismay. 'But so best,' he added philosophically, 'for, if he had taken so much as one glassful more, he'd never reach the Chase this blessed night.'

'So best indeed!' repeated the doctor cheerily.

And a minute more he was in the saddle, and trotting onward as briskly as the stout-limbed horse could bear him, on the road to his home.

Reassured as he was concerning Cronin, his heart sank as his thoughts reverted to Maurice, who partially thrust aside during the excitement of the intervening hours, again assumed his post of prominence, as that excitement passed away.

‘Heaven help the poor fellow, but he has been badly handled! Plague take that fool of a woman, and Arthur Wylde too! If they had even brought him up in any other school! But to rear him with his overstrained notions of honour and fine feeling; to make him a positive anachronism, as much an anachronism in his way as Wylde himself, and then to have it all end in this!’

It never occurred to the good man to take himself to task, for having given his cordial aid and approval to the system of training which, although, unwittingly, he had been the one to inaugurate it, he now thought fit to reprobate. But then he might with justice have argued, that he had been kept in ignorance of the facts which rendered that system perilous; that in his ignorance he had judged it the best, almost the only one, calculated to counteract the influence, which the anomalous nature of the youth’s acknowledged parentage, and position, could scarcely fail to exercise on his mind.

‘Too late for regrets,’ he concluded, as he dismounted at his own door; ‘I must to my old trade of tinkering, and see what I can patch him up into for the future. He has youth, and a grain or two of common sense; and by-and-by I can call religion in to aid. I have worked with worse materials before now.’

He augured fairly well for the condition of his patient, from Matt’s aspect, as he admitted him.

‘How is he now, Matt?’

‘Sleeping like a top, since about two o’clock.

It was ever so long before he came to out of the faint, and when he did he was so weak that he couldn't refuse to do my bidding; so I got off his coat and boots, and made him throw himself on the bed. Then I made him take the draught you left. I put as much of it as I thought he could stand in a strong cup of tay, and gave it to him; and after ravellin' to himself for a while, he went off like a child, and never stirred since.'

The doctor sank wearily into his easy-chair.

'You don't think you can have given me any of it by mistake, Matt? I never felt so drowsy, so completely done up, in my life; and the worst is, that I cannot wait to rest myself. I must be again on the road to Deverell within an hour's time, or worse harm may be done.'

'Worse harm! What is goin' to happen next?'

In brief terms the doctor gave a narrative of the day's occurrences; suppressing, of course, all mention of his own wild suspicions, now for ever happily allayed.

'The "horrors" is nothing new to James Cronin. Take my advice, and let him get out of them as lively as he got in; and do you stay at home, and go to bed. You do look mighty quare, now that I get a good look at you. What did you take since you left this?'

'Nothing since I breakfasted at the Tower, except a couple of glasses of excellent *poteen*, which that rascal, Tim Hagerty, had at hand to tempt me with. I am never the worse for that.'

‘Sorra harm that would do an unweaned child; but for all that you are looking very quare. If you must go, wait awhile till I get you some tay to rouse you; and then you can stretch yourself and take a rest, while I look after the horse, and put together all the things you’ll want.’

Careful as he always was, not to hurry himself, Mr Donovan was on the present occasion more than ordinarily leisurely in his movements; his object being to afford his master time for the nap, which, judging by his jaded appearance, his broken rest of the preceding night had rendered very necessary.

But everything must come to an end; and at last all appliances for the case at Deverell had been collected, the horse attended to, and no further excuse remaining, he returned to the parlour, tea-tray in hand.

‘Here now it is, hot and strong as you like to take it. If you have to go, it is time you were on the road, for it is gone eight, and is dusk already; and before long it will be dark.’

But to this intimation there came back no answer; and stooping down Mr Donovan saw with a chuckle of satisfaction, that the nap had deepened into slumber, as heavy and unbroken as that which bound the senses of the distraught creature committed to his charge.

CHAPTER II.

IT was in the stealthy gathering summer twilight, that slumber all as stealthy had sealed the doctor's reluctant eyes. The summer sun was glowing at its fiercest when he opened them, to find himself still the occupant of his easy-chair, on either side Matt Donovan and Maurice watching him, with faces in which wonder had plainly deepened to dismay.

'Praises above! that you have come to yourself at last,' ejaculated Matt piously; 'we thought you were in a thrance, or dead maybe, when we shook you, and you never stirred.'

'Where am I? What has happened that——'

His tongue, as he struggled for utterance, felt hot and dry; his head as if an iron band compressed it.

'What has happened to me, that you have let me sleep so long?'

'Nothing worse than that you have frightened the two of us out of our senses. You have been sittin' there since eight last night, until now that it is after two in the day, with no more sign of life out of you, than if you were a log.'

‘Merciful God! You do not mean it.’

He strove to rise, but a leaden numbness weighed down each limb; and with a groan he sank back again, covering his face with his hands.

When at last he raised his head, the two men standing silently by, were startled at the change that had come upon him; at the ghastly pallor that left him bloodless to the lips; the vengeful fire that lit up his eye, the look of menace stamped on every feature, transforming him from a homely commonplace mortal, to an avenger, armed to smite the wrong-doer in the midst of his sins.

With no faltering movement now he rose to his feet, and grasped both Matt’s sturdy hands in his.

‘Matt Donovan, answer me truly, as you hope to see the face of God! Is Sir Hugh Grace Woodward’s secret enemy? Is he the man who bribed James Cronin, and whose interest it is to be rid of Cronin now?’

Startled Mr Donovan was, as well he might be, at this abrupt address, which savoured more of the character of an assault, than of a civil demand for information; but being one of those rarely constituted individuals, who are ‘lords of themselves’ in every possible emergency, he quickly regained self-possession, as the protrusion of his obstinate lip on the instant showed.

‘Sorra fear of me harmin’ my sowl by a lie anyhow, for I’ll not answer you at all; and you know it. I swore I wouldn’t from the first.’

‘Man, man! do you want to drive me mad? You have murder on your soul already, and so have I, that I did not force your wretched secret from you. I—— *They have drugged me, I tell you! drugged me, to keep me out of the way while they were plotting murder.* Answer me, that I may go forth to denounce them, even now.’

Unflinching even through this, Matt turned his cunning eyes from his master’s excited face, and fixed them on Maurice, pale and still as a statue by his side.

‘It’s mad he is like the rest of ye. He has caught the complaint among ye all.’

‘Answer him, Matt. We know half the truth already, and we shall know it all soon from Woodward himself. A few days, or weeks at most, will bring him back to clear up all.’

What there was in the accents of the late distraught one that should bring conviction, when the words of a saner speaker were disbelieved, matters not; but at this Matt staggered back, dragging his hands in the action from the doctor’s grasp, and sank to a seat.

‘Water! I’m chokin’!’

‘Don’t both of ye be starin’ at me,’ he gasped presently, when a long draught had restored his power to speak; ‘but tell me what it means.’

‘What Maurice means, he can tell you when I am gone. What I mean is this. They have drugged me—Hugh Grace and a foreign miscreant, a new tool whom he has bribed to serve his purpose. They did it to keep me from going

to Cronin, knowing that in his drunken ravings he might let out other secrets besides his own. That letter was part of the plot, and I now feel that I am late to do more than denounce them; that they have either murdered him, or else driven the desperate wretch to kill himself. We will soon know the whole truth, for Wylde has gone to fetch back Woodward; but I must know it now. Tell it to us, Matt, and let me go.'

Maurice's hand was on his arm.

'Dr Egan—for—for *her* sake——'

'For her sake he shall be spared, were he ten times as guilty. Answer me, Matt; and let me go.'

For once Matt's volubility had deserted him, as he gazed from one to the other with haggard eye.

'It's little there is left for me to tell. What do you want to know?'

'Is Sir Hugh Grace Woodward's enemy? Yes, or no.'

'Yes.'

'What is the tie between them? Who is Woodward that——'

'*He is his one brother, Clarence Bertram; the man that by right should have Deverell Chase to-day.*'

'Clarence Bertram! The man that was burned to death in the cottage up the mountain?'

'The man that they *said* was burned in the cottage up the mountain. You have the whole truth now, from beginning to end.'

An instant's heavy hush, a faint moan, and

then the two elder men, recalled from the dark horror-land to which their minds had wandered, stepped forward; and grasping the tall form as it swayed towards them, laid it gently back upon the couch.

‘Look to him, Matt. I cannot spare a moment, if I hope to do any good.’

Ten minutes later the sound of a horse’s feet, galloping in fierce haste down the road, told that he had departed; whereupon Matt, shaking off the stupor into which the late scene had cast him, bestirred himself, though still in dreamy perturbed fashion, in efforts to revive his charge.

Luckily for the welfare of the said charge, amid all his perturbations it flashed upon him that he had a grievance; we say ‘luckily,’ for just then a grievance was the one only thing, that, with talismanic touch, could restore him to the use of his faculties; could render him on the instant shrewd and cool and cautious, as before he had sustained the shock.

‘It’s mighty free they are to share their secrets, when there’s no keeping them longer,’ he growled.

‘The night they brought him in here, liker to a corpse than to a live Christian, you’d think there was nothing short of their souls they’d grudge to trust me with. But when it’s anything that would take the cockles off one’s heart, and set it thumping like any other fool’s, in my eye then! for all I am likely to larn. You might as well ask who was his grandmother of a fish.’

By this time he had Maurice’s head carefully

propped up; and was bathing the pallid face as tenderly, as though the owner were the long absent object of his thoughts.

‘Wylde is gone to fetch back Woodward,’ he repeated ironically. ‘Is he now? How soon would I have found out that, I wonder, if I hadn’t had another piece of news as valuable to pay down agin it?’

‘Well, well!’ he resumed, after a pause, during which he had wheeled the couch up to the window, so as to let the patient have the benefit of whatever breath of freshening air stirred the sultry stillness without: ‘it’s a quare world, and it’s no lie to say that the longer we live in it the more we come to know. To be sure, I never had much of an opinion of them in the lump, for wherever they are there is certain to be mischief brewin’; but still if I had been put to my oath on it, to name one woman that a man might trust in any day without makin’ a fool of himself, I’d have said that Matty Doran was that one. Matty Doran is the one I’d have picked from a ship-load, wid her *slutherin’* ways, and them blue eyes that could play the divil wid anything softer nor a millstone. And yet, lo and behold ye! here she comes, as bould as brass, and ups and tells a story that——’

Hereat Maurice suddenly opened his eyes, and, with a very unmistakeable gesture of repulsion, strove to thrust him from him.

‘Say one ill word of her, and I’ll strangle you!’ he gasped feebly.

But Matt kept his station and his countenance both unmoved :—

‘Whisht! now,’ he said apologetically, ‘sure I’d not have breathed one syllable, if I thought you wor so near comin’ to. It was not that I was thinkin’ all out ill of her either, but that the wondher got the better of me, old as I am. I’ll never say another hard word of her while I live.’

Poor Maurice buried his face among his pillows and wept. And Matt, knowing that such tears were like Heaven’s gentle rain to the parching earth, that in them was salvation from the danger that menaced reason, if not life, made no attempt to restrain them; but betook himself silently from the room, resolved (in this at least a worthy disciple of his master) to leave nature to do her own work unthwarted; at most but to seek to supplement her efforts, in lieu of aiming, like many a *soi-disant* healer of soul and body, for her unerring system, to substitute a bungling one invented by himself.

He was not long absent, however, and on his return he found his patient, as he had calculated he should find him, lying back, exhausted but calm; a piteous spectacle enough, and one that brought the water to the gruff old fellow’s eyes; but no longer the trance-bound image of despair, to whom one touch of reviving consciousness might bring a doom tenfold worse than death.

‘What would you say to takin’ a turn in the garden, leanin’ upon me? I’m no great things of a prop, but I’ll do for so far.’

Maurice shook his head.

‘I cannot.’

Yet a moment later he rose, and, in contradiction of his words, began pacing the room with restless uncertain steps.

Presently he came to a stop, and, laid a hand on Matt’s shoulder, as the old man stood by the window, patiently waiting until his mood should change.

‘Matt, old man, you have been very good to me. Will you do me one more favour, before we part for ever? Will you tell me all that you know of this wretched story, from first to last? You can do it now without breach of trust, since already I have learned——’

Matt cut him short.

‘Where’s the need of my talkin’, when you say that himself will be soon here along with the captain? Wait a bit, and he will tell you enough.’

‘Before *he* can come I shall have quitted Ireland for ever. I could not face *him*, not to save my soul.’

Matt looked up, all amazement.

‘No offence, *avic*,’ he said drily; ‘but I’d like to make bould to ask you why?’

‘You ask me why! Knowing now whose son I am, can you ask me that?’

‘Troth, I can, and can expect an answer too. What odds is it to *him*, who is your father? If you were own son to the old boy himself, all the same you are the one friend that stood to him in his need; and, moreover, he used to say that you

had got the one face, however you came by it, that it would be new life to him to see again. All that is cause and plenty for me to ask you why ?'

'I have told you that I would not face him to save my soul.'

'More fool you !'

He drew him, too spent to make much resistance, back to his seat, and standing over him held him there with a sturdy hand.

'Listen to reason a bit. Ye mind you, I'll be bound, of the night when I had the bad luck to let slip, how it was James Cronin that had been the one to do the dirty work? Well, you took on fearful hard at that, so hard that you nigh put the life across in me with vexation and bother; yet before two days was out, you had made up your mind to it, and were able to hold up your head, as cheery and darin' as before. Take my word, Mr Maurice, it will be the same now if only you will give yourself time. I don't deny but that this is even harder on you, because you are a man grown now, and all the feelin's is strong in you; and, moreover, the women is mixed up in this, and where they are there is always the divil to pay. But puttin' that aside, what mortal differ, I ask yourself, does it make to *him*, that you are the son of the man that *paid* the bribe, instead of the one that *took* it? I can't say that you've made by the exchange, though one was a *spalpeen* and the other a gentleman. But when the worst is said, it gives you a double claim on him; for you are of

the same blood with himself, besides his loving you as if you were his own son.'

With a shudder the unhappy young man turned from him.

'You mean well, but you torture me! Tell me all and let me go.'

Matt made one last stand.

'But your mother and the captin? You don't say you will go without seeing them?'

Maurice started up, his eyes ablaze.

'If I meet him, I will have his heart's blood! He knew that I had fallen into this hellish trap; he knew that I loved——'

He sank back, the colour slowly fading to a sickly stain in his cheek; his aspect so harrowing, in his agony of shame and self-abasement, that involuntarily the old man turned away, loath to witness to a spectacle, such as no eye, however world-hardened, could look upon unmoved.

'For the Lord's sake, you don't mean to say that he let you set your mind upon her, knowing who you were?' he asked at length.

'O God! no. He knew that I loved her, but he believed that she was lost to me. He believed this; for on the day I came back he told me that she was to be the wife of the man whom I hated so, because——'

He broke down, silenced by the rush of conflicting emotions, which the thought of his fancied rival had let loose.

This man whom he had hated so, because in him he had beheld an enemy, a base interloper,

who had stolen from him the one thing, that in his blindness he had craved to call his own !

A few brief weeks past, the thought that this man held May's love in his keeping, had had power to darken his whole existence ; to strike from him in one hour every hope that had made youth beautiful and fair. Now, in the remembrance that this dear-prized love was his, and not his rival's, lay a world of unutterable shame and misery, from which no refuge waited him save madness, or the grave.

'Square accounts with the captin any way you please,' resumed Matt after a long interval, during which, more moved than he would care to admit, he had perforce held his peace. 'He is a man, and should be made to answer for it if he has wronged you. Square accounts with him and welcome ; but don't be askin' to be revenged upon your mother. I know how hard it is on ye, by reason of the pride and the fine feelin's. But all the fine feelin's in the world cannot alter facts ; and the fact here is, that it's your duty to stick to your mother through thick and thin, and not to desert her in her throuble, if you mean to call yourself a man.'

But at this Maurice roused himself.

'Do not speak of her to me,' he said hoarsely. 'I cast her off. I have no more part with her. I could have forgiven her anything but this. I could have left the sin of her youth between her and her God, and have paid the penalty of it without a murmur ; but to screen herself she let

me plunge headlong into this hell. I cast her off. I will never look upon her face again.'

'No mortal woman could do other than she did,' replied Matt, appealingly. 'The harm was done long ago, but she was young then, and a bad husband is a bad head; and him that led her astray has as many wiles as Satan, as you were told by one that knew him well. She did her best to set things straight. She put between ye and parted ye, the minnit she seen cause to dread anything, and——'

Suddenly the old man changed his pleading tone for the authoritative air of one who, in virtue of his cause alone, has title to be heard.

'Answer me this question, before you set yourself up as judge and jury, all in one. Did you go up to her stout and manful, and tell her it was a mistake about yourself and Miss Nina? You can't say that you didn't know, for I told you myself the day you first came here. Did you do this? or did you *shinge* along, trusting to chance, until the knowledge of your doin's came upon her of a sudden, and shook the saycret out of her, after she clinging to it for so long? Answer that question, before you go on talking like a haythen Turk, that never had a sowl.'

Maurice sat confounded.

Truly Nina's words had been proved prophetic, that it was not only wrong, but yet more, that it was *dangerous* to deceive! Truly, in the weaving of the tangled web that had enmeshed him, aid undreamed of had been given by his ill-starred self.

'If I deceived her, it was for her good, for she was at death's door, and I feared that a word might kill her. Speak of her no more to me. She and I can never meet; nor can I ever again call Arthur Wylde my friend. He could have rescued me, for in the end he knew of this. This was the secret he had wrung from her, and which maddened him. This was the meaning of the words, that seemed to me to be mere lunatic ravings. Listen and I will tell you.'

In hurried, excited phrase, but yet coherently enough to serve its purpose, he went through the tale of his stormy interview with Wylde; every thought of shame or self-reproach, at the unworthy part that he conceived he had himself borne in it, swept away, in the all-effacing shock he had since undergone.

'I let the words pass by me, for when he spoke them I thought that he was mad; but now they seem every one burned in upon my brain. "*If she would not have me rush blindfold to perdition,*" she was to tell me her secret; and to tell it quickly. Those were the very words. Maddened as he was, he could think of this, and give me warning; he could guard against the chance of danger, even though he was certain it could not occur! But my own mother, my own mother! Had she not brought me low enough without this? Must she weigh my soul down with——'

'Whisht, now, and let me think.'

To this strange outpouring Matt had hitherto listened in silence, his habitual expression of

shrewness, and acrid self-approval, gradually merging in one of puzzled surprise.

‘Maurice *avic*, be guided by a friend for once, and don’t go till you’ve seen the captin. It is one saycret rammed inside another; wheels within wheels, as the sayin’ goes; and sorra take me if I’m not more in the dark than ever, now that I’ve heard what passed between you two. Stay quiet where you are, till he comes back.’

‘Once for all, Matt Donovan, will you tell me what I ask, or will you not? You only weary me, for my mind is made up.’

‘I’ll do that same, or anything to pacify you, if you will promise me one thing. Give me your word of honour that you will not ask to stir till the masther comes. He left you in my charge, and it’s as much as my life is worth if I don’t keep you safe.’

‘My word of honour!’ repeated Maurice, bitterly. ‘A fine pledge that would be! Ask for something else.’

‘I’ll have that or nothing. When the worst is said, it is the word of a dacent boy that never broke a promise yet; and I could praise you no higher if you were the son of a king.’

‘You have it then. I did not mean to go without his knowledge. It would be strange gratitude to the one friend who never deceived me, if I were to leave him without a word.’

‘One bargain more, and I’m ready to make a clane breast of it. You must take a pick of dinner and a glass of wine before I speak a word.

To my certain knowledge bit or sup has not passed your lips these two days, and that won't do; for my history is not one to let you listen to fastin', unless I want to have your suicide on my sowl.'

Too wearied to seek to gainsay him, Maurice let him have his way; but though, when the food was brought, he strove to swallow it, eager to do anything to win his jailor to a pliant mood, the effort was a failure; as even Matt himself was reluctantly compelled to admit.

'Don't go on chokin' yourself, if you have no stomach for it,' he said at last. 'Just take off this drop of wine to put a little life in you, and then go sit in the easy-chair by the window, where you can get a breath of fresh air.'

'I suppose,' he began, bringing himself at last to anchor, after a process that he termed 'putting to rights,' which, involving as it did a vast amount of shuffling to and fro, and of opening and shutting of doors, had strained his listener's nerves and patience to the uttermost—'I suppose, now I come to tell it, I'll find you have guessed the most part of it already. You were always a smart boy; so I'll lay two to one you've taken your own meanin' out of what you heard me tell himself.'

Maurice flushed painfully.

'Do not ask me what I think. Put me out of pain as quickly as you can.'

'That is easier said than done, for I never was

much of a hand with the tongue, barrin' when the temper gets riz up in me with vexation ; and that is oftener on the head of a trifle, than of anything serious enough to be made a history of. You'd not mind my takin' a blast of the pipe now, would you ? I know its over-familiar with the like of you, and looks unfeelin' too, and you in throuble ; but there's nothing like it for clearin' the head, when your thoughts has got tangled into a regular black knot, which is the way mine is now.'

Maurice eagerly assented, as in his feverish impatience he would have done to anything, that the tardy *raconteur* had pleased himself to propose.

'Smoke a pipe, man ! Smoke a dozen if you like ; but, for charity's sake, be quick about it, and begin.'

That Matt had probably calculated on the permission being accorded, was evidenced by the alacrity with which he produced pipe and tobacco-box ; and with no graver casualty than that of the sedative agent declining to 'kindle,' until he had made three separate journeys to the kitchen to procure a fresh light, was at last in a fair way to effect the disentangling process necessary, ere he could lay hold on the thread of the story he had got to tell.

'I've mostly noticed,' he began, when, finally, all preliminaries had been adjusted to his satisfaction, 'that when people go to tell you any great things of a story, they make a point of settin' out with an account of themselves and their seven generations ; and, as I take it that that is the

custom in genteel company, I don't see why I shouldn't stick to it in talkin' to you.

'Don't be afeard, though,' as Maurice made a movement of impatience; 'I'm not goin' to thrate you to any long *alligations* about the Donovans; though, if I did, I could tell you what would stir the blood in your veins, and make you burn with shame that you had ever put a red coat on your back, or taken a penny of pay from them, that has used you, and the like of you, for nothing but to keep the sod you sprung from thrampled under foot. All that it consarns you to know is, how the like of me came to be mixed up with the quality; and to tell you that, I need not go into particulars of what took me from home in the year '98.

'It might be that I felt the place lonesome, and no wonder. In the beginning of that year there was a thriving townland, where, by dint of turning their backs on the dhrink, and toilin' late and early, they managed to keep body and soul together, and to lay by a thrifle for the rent; and in that same townland, there was as likely a set of chaps, though it is one of themselves that says it, as you'd meet in a day's ride. There was the two eldest brothers, darlin' boys, as tall and as straight as a poplar tree; and meself, no beauty as you can judge, but thick and strong, and no easier to be bullied by the biggest than I am now. Then there was a first cousin's son to my father, Mike Pender, the best wrastler in the nine parishes; and a cousin of my own, Jim Doyle, and my

uncle's wife's step-son, Dan Casey, and Pat Donovan, another cousin, and Tim Foley and Darby Flynn, and two or three others, that I never trust meself to speak of except in Irish, because it is in that that I say my prayers.

‘Well, that was in the beginning of the year. Before it had come to an end there was a clusther of ruined cabins, with not a roof to every half-score of them; and in one of the desolatest there was a widda woman stretched dyin’ on a heap of straw, and praying her one misfortunate boy, and that was meself, to leave her to die alone, and to save himself from the bloodhounds, that was sure to scent him out before long. It matters nothing what had come to the rest of us. The most part of them had the blessin’ of God on them, and died in fair stand-up fight, and not till the enemy had found out what stuff they wor made of. But three—three of the pick of them, my own brother for one—were strung up at their own cabin doors, and beaten like so many dogs, and then hanged, and all because——’

Here Matt paused, and for some moments puffed away savagely in silence; his face the while assuming an aspect more removed than ever from the benign.

‘It’s only heapin’ sin on my soul to go on cursin’ them,’ he resumed equably; ‘and it happened nigh on fifty years ago, and I’m ould now, and the anger has half burned itself out. And moreover, if you could only come at the end of my

story, not a straw you'd care if I had been strung up along with the rest.'

This was a well-aimed shot, and it hit the mark. In an instant Maurice's face lost something of its dark despairing; grew humanized by sympathy with a suffering outside his own.

'You wrong me, Matt! Heaven sees you do. I feel for you in my heart.'

'Well, maybe you do, though it's not to be expected from your callin'; but anyhow I see you are uneasy, so I'll hurry and try to get along.

'I said that I need not bother you with the reasons why I thought well to quit the place. People *will* talk, you know, if you were rammin' your fist down their throats to stop them; and there were some heard to say, that I was vexed at the way things had gone with my people; and that not knowin' much about handlin' a pike, for I was always reckoned quiet and harmless, I might do mischief maybe, if I happened to get one in my gripe. Others went so far as to say that either me or my twin, and as we had come into the world only one at a time, *he* wasn't easy caught to make an example of, hadn't been far off from two or three places, where the red-coats had got it hot; among the rest, Oulart Hill, the day the sojers were so nately served out, for though that was a good step off from the townland I spoke of, them were times when we did not mind trudgin' a bit, if a friend had to be helped. But anyhow I was not above an advice like you; so I only waited to close the old woman's

eyes, and see her laid in her grave, and then I took a short stick in my hand, and set off for America, to look about me while waitin' for things to mend.

'Sorra much good I did there if I'm to tell the truth. The industry had somehow got put astray in me, and my heart was never in my work; and barrin' that I was honest, and wronged no man, I didn't do much to credit the old place, for I was always thinkin' of it, and longin' to be back in it; so no sooner I got the wind of the word that fresh doin's might be expected, than home I came in the year 1803, burnin' to have it out with them at last.

'We all know how that ended. What little there was of it I missed, owin' to one chance or other; and then thinkin' that no one would be at the trouble of huntin' down the like of me after so many years, and, between you and me, not carin' much if they did, I made up my mind to stay where I was; seein' I could hardly do worse there than I had done abroad.

'The only one of my kith and kin, that I didn't know to have been swept away, was my one sister, that had married and left us, a year or two before the troubles had begun; so the first thing I did, when I had determined to stay, was to set about looking for her.

'It was a long time, a good bit over a year, till I found her, and when I did there was a new sorrow for me. I had left her a fresh sonsy girl, nursin' her first child, and with a fine lump of a boy for a husband, that would think nothing of

MAURICE CRONIN.

knockin' down ten as big as Goliah, if they so much as look crooked at her. I found lone dragged crature of a widda, after bury good provider, and the last of her four little children; and with nothing to keep her from hunger, but what she got for mindin' a gate-lodge, and nursin' the mistress's child.

'That child—this brings me to the real beginnin' of my story—that child was your—was Clarence Bertram Grace.'

With an obvious catch in his breath, Matt laid down his pipe and stared hard before him; as though resolute that no haunting spectres of that olden time should again shake from him his grim composure.

'When I tell you that I had him in my arms before he was a year old, and that he was never but once out of my sight for six months at a time, between that and twenty-one, you'll not wonder that the words should stick in my throat when I try to speak of him, rememberin' all that I heard since, in this same house.

'I had known enough about the Graces in my time, for we were all born and bred not twenty miles from here; and the Graces, and the Desmonds, and Cronins, and the mather's people were among the first quality in the country, and known far and near; and moreover an uncle of mine on the mother's side, had been one of the Deverell tenants under old Sir Betram, only a few years before.

'Sir Bertram was dead and gone by this, and

his eldest son, Sir Deverell, was reignin' in his stead; and it was with Sir Deverell's younger brother Hugh, that my sister was in service, and it was *his* child that she was nursin', when I found her in the gate-lodge of a fine place they were livin' in at Rathfarnham, which is not far outside Dublin, as perhaps you know.

'This Hugh Grace, bein' only a younger son, hadn't had much of a fortune; for his people, like most of the gentry of them days, was apt to live up to the last penny of their rents, and when that was spent, never thought twice before drawin' on what was to come. And so the younger sons had for the most part to do for themselves, which they didn't find over-easy; since by reason of the pride and the grandeur, there were few things, barrin' soldierin' and one or two others, that they didn't think it demeanin' to them to do.

'Anyhow, Hugh Grace, not havin' much comin' to him, had been sent out in his early days to Inja, to make a fortune for himself; which he must have done double quick, for he was a young man still, not over five or six and thirty, when he came home with his wife and their one child, the same that is called Sir Hugh Grace this many a day, and settled down in the fine ould place I tell you of, which he bought out-and-out, intendin' to live there for good and all.

'They had been settled there about a year when Clarence Bertram was born—there was full eight year and more between the ages of the two boys; and it was hearin' of a nurse bein' wanted

for the new-born child that first brought my sister across them. She was nursin' her own at the time, and havin' just buried its father, was hard set to know how to live, when chance threw a good thing in her way; and bein' able to tell Mr Hugh who she was, and how her people had been under his, she was given the child on the spot, and put to take care of the gate lodge at the same time.

'But not to make too long a story of it, there was only Peggy and me in the world, and that made us cling the closer; and seein' no chance of revenge, and feelin' as if sorrow and hardship had taken some of the sperrit out of me, I made up my mind to stand what I could not remedy, and went to stop with Peggy in the lodge. And there she and me lived in comfort and plenty, and happy enough, except when now and again the thought of the ould times would rise up to distract us, until she died, which was when the child was just turned of thirteen year.

'All them years that child had been the light of our eyes to both of us. Talk of a father! but if ever a father loved a child better than I loved him, it is a quare thing. And sure I am, that if he had been put to choose between us, which was most like a natural born father to him, he would not have thought twice before naming me; for every grain of love that the parents had to spare from one another, seemed given to the eldest boy Hugh, and it is little except frowns and harsh words, that our darlin' got from either of them, from first to last.

‘All the love he ever got, he got from me and Peggy; and what good he ever learned he learned from us too.

‘It was we that taught him to say his prayers in Irish; and talking of them same prayers, God sees that the salt tears have come to my eyes, and I sittin’ with him in the loft above, and listenin’ to what he used to say about them. Many is the time, he said, when the black thieves had near put him from his mind in earnest with their floutin’ and jib-in’, and with blows when they would tire of everything else; and when it’s curses would be risin’ to his lips in English, the going over them prayers in a tongue that was always fresh and sweet in his ears, by reason that he had never heard it but in a blessin’ or a tender word—many is the time, he said, that the going over them prayers has given him a stronger grip of his senses, and quieted him, when but for them any mortal man had been driven to despair.

‘But I must not take to tellin’ you of my own feelin’s, for if I do this time to-morrow would not see me at the end. I have said that it is from me he learned all the good he knew, and I said the truth; for I was the first that ever set him on a horse, or that showed him to swim or to handle an oar and a fishing-rod, and that made him the best shot for miles. But you are not to think from that, that he had no book knowledge; for there was a tutor used to come every day for years, and he was kept under him till he was seventeen, a precious *omadhar* he was, by the same token—

the tutor I mean ! and then he was sent to Trinity College ; and there, in a black hour for himself, he fell in with Jemmy Cronin, the man that was never to loose his grip on him, till he had brought him to his ruin.

‘ You will wonder, maybe, why the pair had not met before, but it is easy told why.

‘ Mr Hugh and his brother, Sir Deverell, had never been great friends, for they used to quarrel even when they were boys together ; and save for one visit that Mr Hugh paid at the Chase with his wife and eldest child, when he first came back, he didn’t seem to care about the old home ; but settled down in his own place, where he and his wife were soon thought a power about, and where they used to see no end of grand company all the year round, except now and again when they would go to London ; or after a time, when the long war was over, spend a month or two abroad.

‘ It was partly on account of the coolness, but more, I dare say, because there was no lads in it of the same age with himself, but Clarence had never been to the Chase but once ; and that was when he was a little fellow, when his father sent him down with me. That is how it fell out too, that the masther here nor the captin had never seen him, and that he was able to keep the secret of who he was, all to himself. It was different with your—with Sir Hugh that is now ; for from the first he took kindly to the uncle and cousins at the Chase, and they to him, he and the youngest son, Deverell, that was drowned afterwards, being

near of an age; and though his own father and mother lived on the sight of him, he spent most of his time about here, the same, God forgive me! as if he always had a hankerin' for the place, and meant soon or late to have it for his own.

'I haven't spoken much of him, nor of his mother, for, long as I lived under them, I saw little of them. The master was well enough when you were used to him; troth, now I think of it, there is something of his cut about yourself. I mind me the first time I saw you, when Mattie brought you to the little holdin' yonder, and when you had scarce a stitch of a jacket to your back, you'd hould up your head, and flash your eyes, as if you were the son of a prince. Well, that was himself all out; as proud and quick-tempered as you please, but civil-spoken, and with grand ways with him, and as good a head to them under him, always exceptin' his own son Clarence,—I never saw him look at him but his face would grow black,—as good a head to every one else as could be met.

'Many's the time he has spoken to me fair and affable, and asked an advice of me about this or that; but with Sir Hugh or his mother I don't think that I exchanged twenty words in as many years. They were made on the one pattern, just what you see him now, haughty and commandin', and with a way about them that I suppose they picked up in the Injas, and that stuck to him, young as he was, ever since; a way of sweeping past, as if they had never seen you, which it is my

belief they did not, nor as if they thought no more of you than of the dirt of their shoes. To see Hugh Grace's wife as I remember her, you'd have sworn that at the laste she was the daughter of a king. And her husband's dealin' with her would make you think it too, for, proud as he was, he was a downright slave to her; though all the time it was easy to see that the two was wrapped up in each other, without a thought to spare for any but their eldest son.

'But it's stretchin' into a long preamble, do my best, and it is tirin' you. Maybe I ought to skip all this, and tell you the main point at once?'

'Tell it just as you have been telling it, Matt. I am not impatient now, for I know the main point already. Of course I know it, since I am not a fool; but I wish to hear all you can tell. As I listen to you I seem to see those people, to make acquaintance with them as I could no way else. Tell me all you know.'

'All that I knew for many a year won't take long to sketch; for I've noticed before now, that the biggest things can be often told in the fewest words.

'He was just seventeen, I have said, Clarence was, when he went to Trinity, and fell in with James Cronin. From the first minute I heard that they had come together I felt sorrowful and uneasy, for I knew Jemmy even then to be a prime vagabone—he was about twenty at the time, but the devil himself wasn't older than him in craft and villainy—and, though I didn't all out fear that he'd corrupt my boy, still the crature was young,

and knew no more of the wickedness of the world than if he was a girl; and, moreover, he had such lofty notions, that he'd scorn to think ill of or suspect any one. And so the laste I dreaded was that Jemmy, being smooth and oily, and as cunning as a pet fox, would wriggle himself inside him and suck his brains; and get such a hold of him that by-and-by, if he had any purpose to serve by it, he'd be able to blindfold him, and wind him round his finger like a thread.

'I forgot all this time to tell you that after Peggy's death I had held on as lodge-keeper. But I found it easy enough to get some one to open the gate, and do my turns about the place, and so I kept, after she was gone, to a habit that I had given myself from the first, of comin' down here once or twice every year, and goin' the round of all the old neighbours that was left; and that makes plain to you how I came to know as much about your mother,—her father, Maurice Doran, and me had been cronies all our lives,—and about Miss Nina, and Jemmy, and the master here, and all the rest of them, as if I had been livin' at the door with them all along.

'It was what I had heard of Jemmy from his youngest days, that made me feel as I did. No offence to you now, but he was the meanest and worst of a mean, bad breed; and that is sayin' enough. The Cronins, root and branch, though the equal in blood of the best, had the name of bein' a low-minded, graspin' lot; hard to the poor, and the worst of tyrants to them that they could

get under their heel. And Jemmy-bein' an only child, and as you may say the child of their old age, his father and mother wouldn't hear of correctin' him, but let him have his way in everything; till at last it came to that, that more than one dacent father and mother was heard to curse him, for bringing shame across the threshold, that the like had never crossed before.

'What Mattie saw in him to make her take to him, puzzles me. He tried his hand at deluderin' her along with the rest; and if he had succeeded, not a word we would have heard of his wantin' to marry her. But marry her he did, to the cost of both of them; for the old people, that had shut their eyes on all his villainies, and had spent a fortune twice over in paying his debts, sent him adrift for the only honest act of his life, which one honest act, by the same token, led to his darkest sin; for it is only fair even to him, to say that if he hadn't been at the last gasp for a shillin', he wouldn't have taken a bribe to ruin my boy.

'But I am a good way off from the time of his marryin' yet. He didn't do that for long after he and Clarence had come together, and meantime things fell out just much as I had feared.

'He didn't corrupt the crature, because he couldn't; though for that matter I don't think he tried. From the first day out, he saw that the best of his play was to be fair and plausible; and he did it so well, that before long I saw that there was no use wastin' my breath in hintin' against him, for that, hint as hard as I would, Clarence never would

believe, but what he was one of the best and pleasantest fellows that could be met.

‘High and grand as the mather was, I’d have made bold to speak to him, and ask him to stop the intimacy between them. But just as I had nearly made up my mind to it, he came by his death awful sudden, by reason of his gun goin’ off in his hand, one day when he was out shootin’, along with a gamekeeper, and Mr Hugh.

‘If there wasn’t *milia murther* that day, I’ll leave it to you. Up to then I had never thought Mr Hugh over-fond as a son, but I changed my mind then; for such a black picture of despair and misery, as he looked when he came home with the corpse, I never set eyes on before.

‘The father had lived ten minutes or a quarter of an hour after he had got the charge in him, and Mr Hugh had been alone with him all the time, having sent the gamekeeper off for help; so that it was no wonder he should be a trifle overcome. The only quare thing was, that he never seemed to turn for comfort to his mother, though up to that day the two had been mighty thick; and that from that to the hour of her death, they changed to one another, and grew distant and unfeelin’, as there was many a one to remark that saw more of them than me.

‘Most people set the change down to the account of the father’s will, which left everything he had in the world to his wife, for her to share as she pleased between her two sons. But for my part I never troubled myself about it; for I had

enough to do tryin' to keep an eye on Clarence, who after the father's death, was more than ever under the thumb of my bould Jemmy, to hinder me from thinkin' of anything else.

'Nothing out of the common happened for a year or two more, till Clarence was about twenty; when, takin' advantage of Jemmy bein' out of town for a longer spell than usual, I got round Clarence and persuaded him to go abroad. He had a great knack, had the same Jemmy, of borryin' money. He would borry of you or of me, or, for that matter, of the boy that blacked his shoes; and as he had as tidy a knack of forgettin' to pay, his cronies came not to like it in the long run; and he happened then to have drained Clarence dry, though the boy was always flush of money; for the mother had changed to one son as much as to the other, and from bein' harsh and forbiddin' with him, and keepin' him very tight, had come to be all out as tender and clingin', and as liberal as if she was the Queen. But just then, as I was sayin', havin' drained him dry, and he refusin' to ask his mother for more, Jemmy had gone off, to see, I suppose, and get his hand into the pocket of some other fool, while waitin' for the old people to come round; for it was a custom with them, by way of reclaimin' him, to tighten the purse-strings betimes, and give him never a penny till he'd promise to amend; when he'd take out a fresh lease of divilment, and go on to his likin' till they'd get angry again.

'Anyhow he was gone for awhile; and no

sooner was his back turned than I got round Clarence, and prompted him to go abroad, for what they used to call a *tower*, and take a view of life different from what he was like to get with Jemmy, for I was always dreadin' that he'd soon see more of that than was for his good.

'To make a long story short, off he went at my biddin' and stayed away for more than a year; that was the only time, as I told you already, that he was ever out of my sight for more than a few months together, from the day I took him out of Peggy's arms. And then he came back; and the first minute I set eyes on him, I saw that he was changed.

'He had gone away as gay and happy as a prince, and with a cheery manner about him, as if he was one of them that sorrow would always fall off from, like water from the back of a duck. He came back melancholy and mopin', with not a tinge of colour in his cheeks, and with a pitiful look in his eyes, that, little as I thought it then, was the beginnin' of the woeful look that I seen in them the night you gave him back to me, and that will never leave them now while he has life.

'It was a long time till I came at what ailed him, for he was naturally shy of telling it to me. But at last, havin' no one else to open his mind to, for at the best his mother wasn't one you'd go to with a trouble, he up and told me all that had happened while he was away.

‘It was nothing new to me when I did hear it, for I had seldom known trouble to come but with a woman; the only wonder to me was, and he so soft-hearted, that some of them had not made him sup sorrow long before.

‘What had happened was this:

‘In the course of his travels he had fallen in with Colonel Desmond and Miss Nina; and before the misfortunate pair knew what they were about, they had grown to be that fond of one another, that to part was like tearin’ the heart out of your buzzum. But they had to part all the same; for when he took courage and asked her plump to be his wife, she told him that she was promised already to her cousin, Arthur Wylde; and that, though she loved him, she hadn’t the heart to deny him the comfort of knowin’ that, and had promised herself to her cousin more from fear, because he had threatened to kill any man that would come between them, and then make away with himself, than out of any care she had for him, still that once she had given her word she would stick to it, if it was to break her heart.

‘They were rousin’ fine people, the Desmonds; and though they had their share of failin’s, it was known that they prided themselves off the common in holdin’ by their word; and when she told him that, he knew it was all over with him, and that it was no use to try persuadin’ her, and so left her and came straight home.

‘Just when he badly wanted something to

shake him out of himself, his mother chanced to fall ill.

'She had been livin' a rather lonesome life for a while past, for Mr Hugh had married not long after his father's death, and seldom came near the place; and as she began to get well she grew more tender with Clarence than ever; and nothing would do for her but she must choose him a wife, or, to put it more correct, she had picked out one already, in the daughter of some friend that they had known in Inja, and with as much money for her fortune as would do to set up a bank.

'So long as she was weak and ailing, and that it could hurt her to be thwarted, he humoured her as you did your mother, by letting her think that she was goin' to have her own way. But when she grew strong again, and was for makin' a match of it out of hand, then he told her fair and plain, that it was not going to be. And with that she got as lofty and commanding as ever, and up and told him that if he didn't do her biddin' in this, he should never have more of his father's money, than would just sarve to keep life in him while he was gettin' a profession; but that if he married to her likin' now, she would settle two parts of it on him on his weddin' day, which she said that it was fair for her to do, seein' that Mr Hugh had a great appointment given to him, and, moreover, had come in for a big fortune with his wife.

'But, do her best, she couldn't bend him to her will; and so the pair had a row, and he started

for London, tellin' me that he meant to turn to in earnest, and take up a profession, so as to be beholden to nobody; and that then if his mother came round to be friends with him, well and good, but that, whether or no, the hard work would help him to get over his disappointment, and make a man of him, which he would never be so long as he folded his hands, and sat down to fret.

'Him and me drove to Dublin that evening, and I helped him to gather together his things, and stayed with him till he started, to wish him God speed. Then, little thinkin' when and where I was to see him next, I came home, conning over in my mind that the lodge was a lonesome place from that out; and that before long I'd turn my back upon it, and go spend my old days where I had struck many a handy stroke when I was young.

'I hadn't been any time settled in the little place, not far from here, that I had saved up the means to take for myself, when, all in a slap like, happens so many things, that you'd say that nothing less than the end of the world must be coming next.

'First of all, nothing would do for Beresford Grace, but he must put his *commether* on Miss Edith Wylde, and carry her off from under her father's very nose. Then, only allowing for what time it took him to hurry home, back comes her brother, and follows them to France, and shoots Beresford through the heart; and over here again

at the risk of his life, only to have Miss Nina misregard the *pishroque*, about it's bein' unlucky for a Desmond to take back a promise, and turn a frowning face on him, after giving him all sorts of bad names, as I have heard Martha tell since.

'But you know all about that already; and how within a few months more this present man was Sir Hugh Grace, by reason of old Sir Deverell never liftin' his head after Beresford's death; and of young Sir Deverell, that came after him, being shortly drowned, and of his only child, that was an orphan before it was born, only livin' to be a few weeks old.

'Short a time as it took, others had not been idle neither, for in the thick of it comes the smash upon Miss Nina's father—it had been on the road to him for long, but he had shut his eyes and would not see it coming; and him and her goes off to London, where, finding he was ruined out-and-out, he put an end to himself, leavin' her, without a shillin', or a friend in the world, (for even Mattie had left her a little time before, to marry James Cronin,) to get along any way she could.

'Many was the one would have it, that the way she took must be the bad way, judging by her cousin Miss Edith, when, two months at most after her father's death, she made off from the house of the lady she was stoppin' with—no lady in troth! but a rare ould Jezebel, from what Clarence himself told me since; and could

never be seen a sign of, though she was searched for high and low.

‘It was little to the like of me what happened to them; but still I had known them all from the cradle up, and their fathers before them, and it troubled me to see the young cut off in their prime, or scattered far and wide, with sorrow atin’ the hearts out of them, and me, that could be spared, and no great keenin’ over me, threatening to live on to a hale ould age.

‘But what troubled me most of all was Clarence.

‘I had set my heart on that one boy, and had thought that he was rale down fond of me; and yet, at the end of fifteen months, not a letter had I got from him but one. He had kept writin’ to me constant, he told me afterwards, but, owin’ to my not havin’ left my directions, the letters had all gone astray; and, never thinkin’ that myself was to blame, I took first to frettin’, and, when I got tired of that, to sulkin’, at the bad return he was makin’ for all my care. Huffed as I was, I don’t deny but I’d have written to him, if I had known how; but in my young days divil the thing that ever was handled, that I wouldn’t have gripped sooner than a pen; and, savin’ for the day that I set my mark to the lease for my cabin, I couldn’t tell when I’d had one in my hand.

‘Howandever, just as I was thinkin’ of pocketin’ my feelin’s, and gettin’ a neighbour

that was a tip-top scholar, to write me a few lines, one fine mornin' comes a letter in his own handwritin', with my new directions set down complete, and a Dublin postmark on it; and inside a dozen words to say that he was in Dublin on important business, and, now he had found me out after long searchin', he would run down in a few days to see me, as there was something very particular, about which he wanted to ask me an advice.

'Well, every day from that out, I was on the stretch, late and early, expectin' him. In the mornin's I was up as soon as it was light, and down at the cross roads, where I could first get sight of him. And in the evenin's—it was early October, and they were beginnin' to close in blustry and chill—I'd have the hearth swept up, and the fire blazin' cheerful, and the kettle singin' on the hob, for he was always a good warrant to like a cup of tay, and I had some of the best in the house, and plenty of stronger stuff at the back of it, thinkin' every minute that I'd see him lift the latch, and come in with a "God save all here."

'That went on for the rest of that week, and the half of the next, and then I began to think that something had gone amiss; and so at last one mornin' I set out for the neighbour's I spoke of, meanin' to get him to write me a bit of a note, askin' the reason of the delay.

'I learned the reason soon enough; for on my way I fell in with a boy from E——, that was

takin' the short cut across the fields, to get to his work, and from him I heard the story that had set the whole town ringin' when it reached it the night before: the story of how Sir Hugh Grace's young brother, Mr Clarence, had been burned to death, in the cottage up the mountains, where he had gone to pass the night, so as to be early at the next day's sport.'

CHAPTER III.

ARRIVED at this crisis Matt paused, and occupied himself with carefully refilling his pipe, obviously more because memory silenced him, than for lack of matter wherewith to continue his discourse.

‘It was well over seventeen years,’ he resumed at length, ‘from the day that that heavy news reached me, and heavy it was to me, the same as if he was my own son, and I his ould father gaspin’ to get one sight of him before I’d die; it was well over seventeen years, from that until the night of the snow-storm, when, the minute you had turned your back on the place, takin’ Betty Moore along with you, himself comes and begins some sort of a rigmarole, about wantin’ me to help him in with a poor crature, that the pair of ye had found dyin’ by the road.

‘From the first word, I knew that it was lies he was tellin’; for it stood to reason that if he had met a crature perishin’, and you along with him, the two of you would have brought him in yourselves, without waitin’ for me. But I had that

much dependence out of him, I knew that if he stooped to a lie, he must have cause to show for it; and so I followed him out, and with never a word about how quare it was, to find a man by the roadside snugly tucked up in the best of blankets, which I could tell that they were, dark as it was, by the feel, we carried him in between us, and set him down on the sofa in this same room, where I had kept a rousin' fire burnin', again himself would come back.

'We hadnt him well out of our arms, when he ups, and tells me the whole history right through, and how it was your fear of me turnin' contrary, and blurtin' it all out on purpose, that had kept you from tellin' it to me at first; and with that out he bolts out of the room, sayin' that he had to look for something, which is an old trick of his, when he knows that he has aggravated me into givin' tongue.

'I don't deny but that what he said made me feel twice as contrary, and put me upon heart-scaldin' him some way; though there is no need to tell you, that it wasn't in one of the name to turn informer, and that your saycret was as safe as the bank.

'All the same, I thought I'd let him have the trouble of the job all to himself for a bit, and so was turnin' to quit the room, when the crature gives a moan. And with that I stepped back, meanin' to strip his head and face, and give him air, for you had him so swaddled up in the blankets, that he had hardly a breath to draw.

‘Any other man, seein’ him as I saw him when he opened his eyes, and stared at me, would have thought that it was a ghost, or a sperrit come to haunt him, and have been frightened maybe; but I thought nothing of the sort.

‘I knew at one look that it was Clarence Grace, that they had told me had left no more than a few bones after him, to get dacent burial; and at the same minute, the story that I had been lettin’ in at one ear, and out at the other, and not half believin’ all the time, comes back on me in a flash; and I knew without any tellin’, who it was that had brought him to this, and how, if we didn’t manage to stand between him and harm now, his life, and ours too, maybe, might pay the forfeit of that night’s work.

‘And with that I drove back the tears that were burstin’ from my eyes; and though I was thremblin’ from head to foot, I held in my feelin’s, and I leaned over him, and with my two hands on his shoulders, I said as quietly as I could speak :

“Clarence, my darlin’ boy,” says I, “don’t you know me? Don’t you know your own ould Matt?” says I; “Matt Donovan, that would give his life to save you, from him that is huntin’ you down?”

‘It would have made your heart ache, to see the look that came across him, and to hear the cry he gave, the bit of a smothered screech, that died off to a sort of a dry rattle in his throat, when he fairly knew me. And then somehow he

got out his two hands, and tried to grip mine, and at that the tears burst out and no mistake; for the hands, that I remembered as firm and as strong as a young giant's, had no more grip in them than a new-born baby's, and were worn away to that, that they looked like nothin' human, barrin' a pair of claws; and then the tears began to rowl down his cheeks too, and he was on the point of faintin' off in my arms, when he rouses himself, and says he:

"Don't call me by my name, Matt. No one must know who I am. Promise me, swear to me that you will tell my name to no one."

'I had time for no more than to say, "I'll swear to anything you please," when he was off in the faint again; and before long, back comes the mather, and I laid out my plan about carryin' him up to the loft, which we did on the minute, and had everything comfortable about him, by the time he came to himself.

'It was two or three days before I had got at the bottom of the story; for he was so weak, that as soon as he'd begin tellin' it, the grief and the rage together would get the better of him, and I'd have to make him leave off. But at last I had it all from beginnin' to end, and a bitter sorrowful tale it was.

'I have told you how he and Miss Nina had got to be so cruel fond of each other, that it was like tearin' their hearts out to have to part.

'Well, it seems Miss Nina took huff with him, as she told him afterwards, for not comin' to her

when she had broken with the captin. She took it for certain that he must have heard of it, but he had not; for he had kept to his word about workin' hard to get rid of his grief, and had gone to some quiet place a few miles beyond London, where none of his friends knew where to find him. And so, though he had heard of the cousin Beresford's death, he knew nothing about the colonel being ruined and then killin' himself, nor about Miss Nina nor the captin; till one day that he was in London on business, by the merest of chance he meets her in the street, comin' out of a news-office, where she had been advertisin' for some way of earnin' her bread.

'There is no use stretchin' it out into too long a preamble. There are old fools so many a goin', that it don't do to be hard on the young ones; but the end of it was, that he lost no time in getting a license, and that two days later she quitted Mrs Stanley's, who had used her so onmannerly that she had made up her mind, even before meetin' him, not to stop longer under her roof; and she and Clarence were married the same day, in a little chapel, that had to hide itself away in a far corner of the city; no one but the priest that married them, and his clerk and the old pew-opener, that sarved as witnesses, bein' by to bid them "God speed."

'They had a reason, each of them, for wishin' to keep it secret for a while. Miss Nina didn't want to have it said, that she would marry so soon after all her troubles, for her father wasn't dead,

as I have told you, over six or eight weeks ; and, moreover, it isn't clear to me, from a word your mother once let drop, but that she was afeard of the captiu wantin' to have revenge when he would find it out. Then, for his part, Clarence didn't wish to anger his mother past all forgiveness, by seeming to defy her, and she so weakly in her health. So they agreed to keep it to themselves a while longer ; and then he took his young wife off to a little cottage a mile or two outside London, where they sat down to begin life together, knowing no more of the world, nor of its wickedness, than if the pair of them had been the babes in the wood.

'For about six months or so, they were as happy as the day is long, for they doted alive on one another, and there was no one to come between them ; but the divil soon tired, I suppose, of leaving them in peace and quiet, and so one fine mornin', walkin' into town, Clarence meets Jemmy Cronin, and on the spurt of the moment, tells him all about his marriage, and brings him straight home.

'Jemmy had just then deserted your mother, after givin' her the worst of treatment, and tryin', by dint of *stravagin*' her through all sorts of bad company, to make her of the one pattern with himself ; for a purty young wife was just the card that the like of him would have managed to win with, if she would only have let him shuffle her with the rest of the pack, and deal her out any way he pleased. But there was always the scent of the

clover-fields about Mattie; and do his best he could never make her——'

Here, the recollection of the late discovery flashing on him, Mr Donovan broke off short in his panegyric, a comical look of perplexity twitching his harsh features; then, suddenly assuming the aggressive, as was customary with him when he had to recover from a slip——

'Well, when all is said and done, she was a good creature, and she is so still. An angel out of heaven would not have kept true to a vagabone, that had given her nothing save blows and curses, since the day he had decoyed her from her home; and at the worst you are still her son, and should be the last to give her a hard name.'

'I have not done so,' said Maurice, gently, 'nor do I ever mean to do it. Let us leave her, Matt, and get on with your story. I am sickening to hear it to an end.'

'You won't have to sicken long. Jemmy, as I was sayin', was just after desertin' your mother, but you may be sure he didn't say so; and as Miss Nina was full of questions about Mattie, and when she was comin' to see her, he made up a story of how Mattie had gone back to Ireland, in the hopes of softenin' his people to them; and how she had fallen ill there, and was being taken care of by some friends of her own.

'Mr Clarence believed in Jemmy still, and if he had had any doubts of him, the fact of his havin' married Mattie, that Miss Nina was so fond of, and his makin' out to think such a power

about her, would have put them all clean out of his head; and finding that Jemmy was short of cash, and all by reason of his marryin' beneath him, nothing would sarve the *omadhawn*, but he must share his purse with him. He had a trifle by him still, and as long as he liked to keep his marriage a secret, he could draw his allowance from his mother; though as soon as ever he could have himself made a lawyer of, or else get something that would keep him in bread, he intended to take no more of her money, for he felt like a cheat, he said, every shillin' that he took from her, and he hidin' his marriage all the time. But, as I said, he had a trifle by him still, and he went on sharin' it with Jemmy; and at last took him, while he was waitin', as he made out, for Mattie, to stop with him in his own house.

'Ill luck crossed the threshold with the same lad; for the very next mornin' a letter comes to Clarence, askin' him to go to an address in London, where he'd find one that had something of consequence to tell him, and to make no delay, if he wished not to be too late.

'Not liking to misregard what might be a warnin' for his good, Clarence goes to where the letter told him, which was some low miserable hole in the heart of London town; and there he sees a strange man, that he had never set eyes on before, a misfortunate scarecrow of a crature, with scarce a breath in him to put ten words together, and three parts gone already in a decline.

'There is no need to tell you bit by bit what

THE FORTUNES OF

d between them. The first thing Clarence, bein' always soft-hearted, was to get the man something to eat, for he looked to be at the last gasp with hunger; and then he listened to the story, which the other had come from a long way off to tell, and which he had plenty of proof about him to make good.

'That story wasn't a pleasant one for a son to hear, as your own feelin's will leave you able to judge.

'The strange man was his mother's brother; and the story that he had come to get the sin of from off his soul, was just this:

'Hugh Grace's wife, that looked like a princess, and that used to sweep by me, and the like of me, as if we were the dirt of her shoe; the woman I've seen that man almost kneel to, as if he was her born slave; that same woman was the wife of a poor tradesman in the south of England, when Hugh Grace, home once on leave from his post in Inja, saw her and got mad about her; and she gettin' all as mad about him—he was a fine man, and no mistake! he got round her, so that she agreed to quit her husband, and go with him to Inja, where he was just settin' sail for again.

'She came down from London, and went on board the same ship with him, disguised as a widow lady, that was goin' out in charge of two children to their parents—that was true, for he managed some way underhand, so that she got charge of some one's children goin' out; and when they landed in Inja he married her in the name of

Mrs Smith, and took her up with him to his station up the country ; not a soul, either there or in England, havin' the ghost of a suspicion of the truth.

'They had counted, I suppose, on goin' on without bein' detected all their lives ; and so they might, if her brother, who was workin' at the same trade with her husband, when she ran away, had not taken it into his head to enlist, after he had seen the fool of a husband landed into a madhouse, for grief at her loss. And as luck would have it, his regiment was ordered to Inja, and up to the very place where Mr Hugh and the wife was livin' like a king and queen ; when who should he see, in the grand lady that he wasn't supposed so much as to lift his eyes to, but his own sister, whose wickedness had been the means of breakin' up a dacent home, and drivin' two honest men to the bad.

'He was an honest man, by his own showin', up to that, but he didn't long continue so ; for no sooner had he a saycret worth sellin' than he sold it, the upshot of it all bein', that Hugh Grace and the sister came around him, and that for a good heavy bribe, he agreed to hold his tongue, and to let them buy him out of the army, and send him back to England ; where he promised to stay and keep watch, and to send them word if anything happened to the husband, when Hugh Grace was to make her his wife in earnest.

'He kept to his promise by staying in England, and watching by the mad husband till he died, which wasn't till Hugh Grace's eldest child, that

he had seen an infant in Inja, and that is now Sir Hugh, was nigh on to six year old. And then he sent word hot foot across to them, and the pair got themselves married over again—I don't know how they managed to do it unbeknownst, nor where, but they *did* manage somehow to get it done tight and sure; and then immediately came home, and settled down in Ireland, about a year and a half before their only other child, Clarence Bertram, was born, in the old house at Rathfarnham, that Hugh Grace lived in ever after till his death.

'They paid the brother a second good swingeing sum to take himself away for ever, and never to trouble them more; and so off he went to Australia, or the States, or some other far-away place, meanin' to keep fair and honest to his word. But the hush-money wouldn't thrive with him. Turn his hand to what he would, he had no luck, and the adventures that he went through, it seems, would fill a book; till at last, findin' the devil's pay none of the surest, and his health failin' him, and he beginnin' to tire of doin' villainies for nothin', he thought he'd take a turn at repentance; so home he comes, resolved to look how things stood, and to do justice, if he could find that there was any one he had helped to wrong.

'It was easy findin' all he wanted to know.

'His sister was livin', but her husband was dead, and their eldest son had just come in for his title and was now Sir Hugh Grace; while the youngest, him that he knew should by rights be a barrow-knight in his stead, he had left home,

and no one about the place could give tale or tidin's of where he was gone.

'He went first to his sister, and sent up a bit of a note sayin' who he was, and why he had come back. But it seems, that she and the husband had heard tell years before, that he was dead ; and she either believed, or made out to believe, that she took him for an impostor, and bid her servants turn him from her door. Upon that, rightly thinkin' that to go to the man in possession would be a false move—he had crossed many a bridge in his time, and had larned 'cuteness for his pains ! and not carin' to bully until he had tried quieter means, he set to work to find out Clarence ; and in the long run succeeded, but not till he was at the last gasp of distress and wakeness, and had scarce strength left in him to get through with what he had to tell.

'The first thing my poor *gosssoon* did, when he recovered from the shock of listenin' to such an ugly tale, which he didn't give in to either till he had seen plenty of proof, such as letters in his father's and mother's handwritin', and copies of the certificates of her *three* marriages, and enough to do away with every doubt ; the first thing he did, was to cast about for some means of keeping the whole matter a saycret from all the world.

'For a black minute or two he didn't deny to me, but that a struggle went on inside of him, when he thought of his darlin' young wife, that, with God's blessin', would soon make him a father, and remembered, that it was not himself only, but his

unborn child, that his wicked parents had robbed. But at the same minute comes the thought of his own mother, and that, bad as she was, she was his mother still, and that it would ill become him to seek to advance himself at the cost of her good name.

‘Anyhow he had no intention to do it, for, as I was sayin’, his first thought, when he had pulled himself together after the shock, was how he must take care to hide it from every one; for his mind was made up on the spot, that not even his wife should ever know a thing, that could bring disgrace on him, or them that owned him.

‘Well, to cut it as short as I can, he didn’t stop that day till he had the man moved to clean, dacent lodgings, where he could have fresh air and a chance for his life; though it was plain from the first that the hand of death was on him, and that a few weeks, more or less, was the most that he could hold out. And when he had done that he left him, promisin’ to come every day and sit with him, and offerin’ to bring him a doctor and his clargy; and, when he refused to see one or the other, cautionin’ him not to open his lips to mortal, but to let what had passed between them be the same as if it had never been said.

‘This went on for a matter of six or seven weeks; he goin’ out every mornin’, after tellin’ Miss Nina that he had great business to attend to, and spendin’ the whole day long with the dyin’ crature, tryin’ to bring him to a sense of his situation, and biddin’ him make his mind

easy, for that he would take the cost of all the harm that had been done, on himself.

‘At last, on goin’ in one mornin’, he found that the poor crature (William Stonor was his misfortunate name) had died within an hour of his quittin’ him the night before, and when, by some ill chance, it had happened that there was no one in the house. And then, not sorry that his job was finished, my poor boy gave him a dacent berryin’, and went home; happier in his mind than he had felt for long, and promisin’ himself to love his darlin’ wife twice as well, if it could be, than he had done before, to make up for the wrong that he must go on doin’ her and her children to the end.

‘For a week or two more, things went on fair and smooth, Clarence purtendin’ to take again to his reading that had been broken in on by his goin’s to and fro; but all the while debatin’ whether or no he oughtn’t to go to his mother, and bid her to set her mind at rest—he knew of coorse that she must be mortal anxious, for that it was all nonsense her makin’ out to take her own brother for an impostor—and to tell her that her credit was as dear to him as his own, seein’ that the one was wrapped up in the other, and that he would never be the one to sully it, for the sake of gains.

‘One day he’d say to himself that he’d do it, and the next he’d draw back, shrinkin’ from the thoughts of puttin’ her to the blush before her own child. And while he was shilly-shallyin’ this way, in comes Jemmy Cronin—he had quitted the

cottage while Clarence was in the habit of stayin' so much from home, but used to come to see them of an odd time—in comes Jemmy, and plumps out with a story, that from the first word had Clarence's hair standin' on end.

'He made a long rigmarole of it, for he was always a great hand at plausin'; but stripped of all his fine sayin's, it came to this :

'He knew, he said, the nature of the business that had brought William Stonor to England. The saycret, or at least a part of it, was in the keepin' of others besides Clarence, for Stonor had gone blabbin' to more than one; and his only reason, he said, for openin' up such a sore subject was, that he and Clarence might put their heads together, and stop the mischief before it had gone too far.

'Well, the upshot of it was that he sucked the poor gossoon's brains, till bit by bit he got to the bottom of the whole story, Clarence even bein' fool enough to give him a sight of the papers he had got from Stonor. And then Jemmy left him, after givin' him an advice to go straight across to Ireland, bringin' the papers with him to show to his mother, and to get money from her to buy up all them that could do harm without delay; promisin' at the same time to hurry after him, and to meet him at a little inn, nigh hand to where there was fine shootin', and where the pair of them had had many a good day's sport before now.

'That same day Clarence bid good-bye to his

wife, little thinkin' that it was the last time he was ever to see her in this world ; and then across with him to Dublin, and from that writes me the letter I told you of, sayin' that he wanted me to give him an advice.

'It was only on reachin' Dublin that he chanced on my right address ; and it struck him then that after waitin' to see Jemmy he'd run down to me, and tell me the whole story straight through. Now that others knew it, there was no reason why he should scruple lettin' me be one, more especial when I was the fittest he could depend on ; for what he planned to do, was to write a letter to his mother, and to put the papers that Stonor had given him into it, and entrust it to me to carry to her, not wishin', as I've said already, to put her to the blush before her son. And in the letter he meant to tell of his marriage, and to beg of her to do him what justice lay still in her power, by willin' him his father's money, as a set-off against the wrong, that for her sake he was goin' to do his own child.

'You can see purty plain to the end now for yourself.

'He waited at the inn for Jemmy for more than a week ; when, just as he was beginning to lose patience, up turns Jemmy, this time with another story, about how he had been to his home, and had got to be friendly again with his people ; and how there was a good prospect of his gettin' money from his father, enough to stop the mouths

of them that he said was gapin' for it, without Clarence havin' to trouble or mortify the old lady at all.

'It seems quare to you and me, how any one with a grain of sense could be so easy bamboozled. But I told you already that he believed in Jemmy, and he couldn't be made to misbelieve in him, till the day that he woke up a presner in a lonesome house, with his brother on one side of him, and Jemmy Cronin on the other; and heard the pair of them, quite cool and deliberate, pass sentence on him, what was to be done with him for the rest of his days.

'The way they managed that trick was simple enough.

'While they were waitin', as he made out, for a day or two for the money to come from old Cronin, Jemmy proposed that they should wile away the time with some shootin'. And there bein' a snug little shanty about eight mile off, that the landlord could get them the lend of, they set out one day after an early dinner, intending to reach it fair and easy by dusk, so as to be fresh for the sport next morning.

'They had done to within about two mile of the distance, when hot foot comes a lad after them from the inn, with word that a messenger had come for Mr Cronin, and that he was wanted back without delay.

'Clarence was for turnin' to go with him, but Jemmy said that there was no need; and that as the lodge had been made ready, a snug bed fixed

and a fire kindled and all, the best of his play was to go on, and not fatigue himself for nothing; for that he would join him most likely before nightfall, or by farthest early in the morning, in time to begin the day well.

‘The last thing that Jemmy did as they were partin’, was to unbuckle the knapsack that he carried, and to hand it to Clarence.

‘There is plenty of tay and bread and butter and eggs up at the hut,’ says he, ‘but you’ll be wantin’ something stronger, to keep up your sperrits, if you have to pass the night by yourself; and so don’t fail to take a good pull out of that, before you lie down,’ says he, ‘and divil a ghost or a fairy will trouble your rest. And you need not be leavin’ any for me,’ says he, ‘for I ordered Patsy Dunne to send up a gallon after us in the mornin’; and if I come in the middle of the night, it won’t be empty-handed, you may depind.

‘With that the two parted, and Clarence went on to the lodge; and after the woman that had been hired to make things tidy, and that lived a half mile or so farther on, had bid him good evenin’, and taken herself off, promisin’ to come in the mornin’ and light the fire for him, he shut to the door, and the night closin’ in wet and blusthry, he sat himself down by the fire, and had his supper. And as the time wore on, he took out Jemmy’s flask out of the knapsack, and by the way of makin’ himself comfortable, finished it to the last drop; and then turned into bed, feelin’ cheerier in

his mind somehow than he had done for many a day.

‘It was the last time, God help him! that he was ever to feel cheery in this life; for when he woke up, when and where he never knew, there was Sir Hugh on one side, and Jemmy on the other, ready with the story of the evil plot that they had made to trap him, and which they told out plump, without cap or cloak, meanin’, as they admitted honest enough, to drive him from his senses with the fright and misery, on the spot.

‘How they failed to do it is the wonder, for only to over it, is enough to make one sick.

‘They offered him no terms; but, as I said before, just passed sentence on him for the crime of havin’ found out, what it could hurt his brother and his mother for him to know.

‘They had smuggled him out between them at night from the cottage, after Jemmy had dosed him with the poisoned whiskey—that was an old trick you see with Sir Hugh, so no wonder he tried it on the master yesterday, havin’ found it prosper so well already; and then they set fire to the hut, and burned it down; havin’ first taken a dead body that they had managed to lay hands on, and thrown it on the bed, so that there should be some bones found, to bear them out in the story they meant to tell.

‘Troth the way they came by that same corpse, was the dirtiest part of the whole business, and went to prove, so far at least as Jemmy was concerned, that he took to divilment more for divar-sion than need; for he went through a power of

dirty work of his own accord, to sarve Sir Hugh, when he could have got as much, or more maybe, in the long run from Clarence, for only promisin' to hold his tongue.

'The way that by Jemmy's own account they managed about it was this:

'It had struck them, when first they were sketching their plan, that it could never be believed that a man had been burned to death, without some bones at least bein' to the fore, when all was done; and for that reason they had been minded to give it up, and take to another. But they found after a bit, that no other plan could sarve their purpose half so handy; so they fell back on it again, detarmined that since bones was wanted, *bones* they would have, if they could be got at by any means short of murder.

'How to get at them, though, was the puzzle, without takin' some one else into the saycret; and, as that wasn't to be thought of, Jemmy admitted that he was put to the pin of his collar for some device to suit, when chance helped him, better than with all his cleverness he could have helped himself.

'It was at the house that Sir Hugh kept up then in Dublin, and where he was stopping at the time with his wife and a throng of sarvants, that the whole thing was arranged; and it had just become clear to them that their plan had the one sarious hitch in it, and that if they could not get over that hitch, they must give it up, and fall back upon a worse, when, as the divil would have

it, Lord pardon me! one of the grooms, a sickly young chap that I had known all his life, without once dramin' of the use he would be one day put to, caught cowl'd after a terrible wettin'; and in three days' time was carried off with inflammation of the lungs.

'No need to go into particulars of how they managed, when once they had got their man.

'The poor chap was the orphan child of one of the tenants at the Chase, that old Sir Deverell had thought a dale of; and the last thing he had prayed when dyin', was that he might be carried back, and laid among his people. And there bein' no one of his kith or kin remainin' in the land, what more natural and feelin', and more like a good kind master, which it was in all of the name to be, than that Sir Hugh should take heed of his request? and should make it his convenience to go down at the same time to Deverell on business, and be on the spot himself, so as to see that the berryin' was done in style?

'What more natural than all that? and what easier than for him and Jemmy to unscrew the lid of the coffin, the night before it was to leave for Deverell, and take out the body, puttin' something as heavy in its stead, and then carry it off to a safe place until they should want it, which was to be as soon now as Sir Hugh could hurry back; for a great part of this time, they had Clarence waiting at the inn near the mountains, where Jemmy had got him to come, so as to have him at hand when all was ready; it being:

their intentions, as I said before, to fall back on a second plan, for making away with him, if they could not carry through the first, without more delay.

‘It would have made your blood run cold, to hear him tell of the easy-goin’ jeerin’ way that Jemmy went over the whole, not skipping one atom, but tellin’ it all as if it was the best of jokes; though once in the midst of his jeerin’, he turned savage, and let slip how the main reason he had for joinin’ Sir Hugh was to be revenged upon Miss Nina, who he said had trated him with the greatest of contempt long before, when it seems he had the impidence to make up to her, and to ask her to be his wife.

‘Anyhow, by the time Clarence heard of it, their plan was complate enough; for, to wind up their story, what do they do, a day or two later, but show him the paper, where he read, in black and white, an account of the awful melancholy death of Mr Clarence Bertram Grace, and how the misfortunate young gentleman had come to his end, through settin’ fire to the place and he drunk; seein’ how his comrade, Mr James Cronin, who was in the hoighth of sorrow after him, had been obliged to admit, that he was of shockin’ intemperate habits, and had been drinkin’ heavy for a long time past.

‘It was all a *do*, I needn’t tell you, about Jemmy bein’ wanted back on the night of the fire; and had been settled between them, so that Clarence should be in the hut all by himself. And

all Jemmy's alligations, about Stonor havin' gone blabbin' to others, was lies too, from first to last.

'The crature had kept to his promise about not exchangin' word with mortal; but Jemmy had smelt out a saycret, by reason of Clarence, who was always heedless, havin' dropped the letter that Stonor wrote, askin' him to come to him, and Jemmy having chanced to pick it up, and, no need to say, read it through, like the mean spyin' vagabone that he was. In the letter were some words about *wantin' to do him justice, and havin' that to tell him, that would alter his whole life*. From them words Jemmy had jumped purty nigh the truth, and had dodged Clarence late and early, tryin' to get in to Stonor. And the night that Stonor died, he managed to get rid of the woman of the house upon some errand, and had got into the room to him; and the crature bein' stupid-like through bein' at the point of death, and Jemmy purtendin' to have come from Clarence, he got him to drop out a word or two, that helped him to a nearer guess, and that he was afterwards able to make a handle of, so as to pump Clarence high and dry.

'I said it made me sick to over it, and for that reason I'd like to hurry to the end.

'Jemmy's first move, the minute he had the story all complete, was to go off and make his bargain with Sir Hugh. He saw at once that Clarence was no mark, for the lad hadn't sixpence, nor wasn't likely to have; for the old lady was game to the backbone, and would hold on by the

money that her husband had left her the control of, all the tighter if it was to go to threats. So he went straight, without loss of time, to Sir Hugh, knowin' well that it was from him he'd get the highest price.

'Sir Hugh wasn't all out taken aback, for he had known the truth for long; and so the bargain was struck, and the scheme planned all at the one sittin'. His father, it seemed, had told him how things stood, the day he came by his death, and while Sir Hugh had held him dyin' in his arms—that was the cause of the dark looks, that I had set down to grief, and of the cowliness between him and his mother from that day; and had laid it on him as his last commands, that he should share everything evenly with Clarence, by way of doin' him all the justice that he could.

'It was all to no use that Clarence went down on his knees, and swore he didn't want justice; that he would go off to America or anywhere, and never be seen or heard of again, if only they would not ask to part him from his wife.

'It was mighty fine, Sir Hugh said sneerin', for him to be ready to swear to that now. There was a time when himself had thought it easy to be honest, he said, but that was before he was tempted; above all, that was before his eldest born son was laid in his arms. From that day out, he said, he had made up his mind to do any mortal thing he might be driven to, sooner than that loss or harm should come to his child (it wasn't that poor *gossoon* of a Percy he meant, for he wasn't born then,

but another that had come before him); and it would be the same way with Clarence by-and-by. A father could stand anything rather than see his children put from their rights. It was always the way with the Graces, to make idols of their own, and Clarence was one of the stock; and easy as he found it to take an oath now, he'd break it all as easy in his own good time. The only way to make things sure, was to keep him tight now they had him; and tight he was goin' to be kept.

'And so down they brought him by night to Deverell Chase, where there was only an old servant or two, and shut him up in a far-off room; from the window of which room he looked on, as himself told you, at his own funeral, goin' to the family buryin'-place.

'And after, it might be three months or more, durin' all which time they had kept him there a presner, with Jemmy for his gaoler night and day, they brought him off one bitter winter's night, when the snow lay thick on the ground, and took him to the old Desmond grave-yard, and showed him the new-made grave, where Arthur Wylde has since set up the big white cross, and told him that underneath lay his wife, his beautiful young wife, that by this time should have been the mother of his child. And thinkin' that after that he'd have but little wits remainin' to be driven out of him, they hawked him off to Moorfield Asylum, and handed him over to old Ashlin, who never let go his grip on him, from that till his dyin' day.

'Ashlin, it seems, was some sort of a cousin of

the mother's, and had wanted to marry her in her youth; and though I believe she had given him dog's treatment, he was down to her shoe-tie, the same as every man she ever came across.

'He had got blown upon in England, where he was a doctor, for some sort of quare practices, and had come over here, and chancing to meet with her, had put his *commether* on her again; and she, bein' a woman of a high sperrit, didn't deny his claims, but did what she could for him, and, moreover, laid it on Sir Hugh (there was as little disguise as there was good-will between Sir Hugh and her, from the day when he had come to her, and told her what her dyin' husband's words had been) to give him a helpin' hand. And as, in the coorse of helpin' him, Sir Hugh found that he was ready to do any sort of dirty work so it wasn't over and above, troublesome, the first thing he does, immediately on Jemmy comin' to him, was to send for Ashlin, and strike a bargain with him—it was from Ashlin's own lips that Clarence had this; and the end of it was that, while Clarence was bein' kept a presner at the Chase, Ashlin bought Moorfield Asylum out and out, with money given to him by Sir Hugh, and fitted it up in style, and got his license, or whatever it was he wanted, to begin his divilment, and set up in it as a mad-house doctor; his first patient bein' the man, that the whole country-side was talkin' of havin' come to such an awful end.

'You know now all you have any business to know; for to go into the ins and outs of what he

suffered from that ould tiger and his right-hand man, Mr Grimes, wouldn't agree with you, any more than it did with me.

'From the day that they brought him to Moorfield, he never saw sight of Sir Hugh nor Cronin, nor, for that matter, of the face of a mortal, barrin' Ashlin' himself, for more than a year; but then the ould villyan picked up Grimes, and set him to mind him night and day, after first threatenin' him with all sorts of vengeance, if he dared to let Grimes know who he was, by so much as a word.

'Their whole aim, from beginnin' to end, was to drive him mad in earnest, and how they failed is the greatest of miracles; for to do it they stopped at nothing, from the day they got their grip on him, until God sent him straight to your door, to be rescued by his enemy's son.

'And that,' concluded Matt, with fervent emphasis, 'is the one thought, that ought to comfort you in all your sorrows, and make you hould your head up with the best of them, yet. Your father, whether you call him Hugh Grace or James Cronin, was the doer of the mischief, but you were the one to mend it; and it is seldom that the son of a bad father has the luck to be able to say that. Take heart of grace, *avic*, and fight down your troubles. You've a great deal left you to live for yet.'

Maurice lay back with closed eyes, too sick at heart, too crushed down, to utter a word of comment, when at length the old man had brought his tale of guilt and misery to an end.

‘A great deal left him to live for yet!’ He, the nameless, dishonoured son of the man, whom that tale had shown forth a traitor of the foulest dye! an assassin! for longer to doubt whose the hand by which Purcell had met his doom, was idle folly; mere futile playing at the woman’s game of hoping against hope.

From boyhood up, the consciousness of his father’s guilt had preyed upon him. From boyhood up, he had chafed beneath the grievance, of having to acknowledge himself James Cronin’s son; had deemed, that to free himself from the shame of such vile parentage, he would willingly change places with the poorest wretch that breathed.

Now, to win his way back to the stand-point from which he had been hurled, to feel that to this, the meaner sinner surely, but who yet had not trafficked in his own flesh and blood, he owed existence, what would he not give, that mortal man has power to barter, even to the soul that revolted from another’s crime?

Feebly enough, for the shock that had stunned him, had well nigh stricken from him youth and strength, he rose, and began pacing up and down the room.

‘Leave me to myself for awhile, Matt,’ he said presently, ‘I think I would be better if I were left alone.’

He was standing by the window, the glowing August sunset lighting up his haggard, altered face; and as, in the act of refilling his pipe, Matt raised his eyes, something in the aspect of that

haggard face struck him forcibly; and pausing only until the task in hand was methodically completed, in turn he rose, and came to his side.

‘I don’t like to intrude my company where it is not wanted,’ he said drily, ‘but all the same I’ll keep as close watch on you, as if you were my presner, unless you calm down, and promise me that you won’t dare to attempt, what I think that I can read this very minute in your face.

‘Listen to me a bit,’ he continued earnestly, ‘I am a bad hand at preachin’; and if I was to try it on you, you would shut me up in one breath with havin’ such loads of book larnin’, so I’ll lave it to yourself to settle what you owe to your Maker, and only ask to say a word or two of sense. Whoever else has done you hurt or harm, the masther here has always been a good friend to you; and rough and ready as he is, it is my belief, that he’d never do a day’s good, if you were to come to sorrow. For his sake—he is gettin’ on into years you know, and will soon want somebody to lean upon, for his sake you ought to strive and rouse up; and if you do, you may dipind on it, you will find my words come true, that you have a great dale left you to live for yet. You don’t believe this now, as how could you? I mind me of the time when I was little older than you, when my life was a burthen to me, the same as yours is to you now; and when the divil had me pushed so hard, with joggin’ my elbow night and day, and tellin’ me I had nothing left to live for, that I was more than once goin’ to spare him all trouble, by

puttin' an end to myself to plase him, on the spot. You think there is no sorrow like your own, seein' that a woman is at the bottom of it; yet if you knew but all, there is not a mother's son breathin', but could tell you something like it, if they had a mind. Couldn't I tell you myself, only it's little you'd care to hear it, how there was a girl once that I'd go through fire and wather for, and that I thought was mortal fond of me, seein' that we were to be married in a twelvemonth; and how it was her that planted grief and ruin amongst us all, with her treachery and desate, and with doin' what never an Irishwoman, barrin' herself, ever done before; turnin' an out-and-out *Judas*, and *slutherin'* and kissin' them, that she was takin' a price for behind their backs? What would be your feelin's this day, if you had found out, as I did, that the girl you loved had been false to you for the sake of another man; one of the enemy too, that had nothin' but his red coat to deludher her with? and that him and her were to be made up for life, with what they'd get for sellin' your blood? You think that yours is the cruellest case in the universe; but at the worst you and Miss May—you need not shiver at the sound of her name, you'll have to get used to it! at the worst you and Miss May are sufferin' for the sins of other people, and not your own, and there is a power of comfort to be found in that, as you'll know before long. And moreover——'

'For God's sake, stop, man! You torture me.'

‘I do it for your good. You had a look upon your face a while ago, as if the devil was promptin’ you to make away with yourself; which it’s my belief that he was. And, as I said then, I’ll not lave you alone, until you promise me, that you’ll snap your fingers at him, as with God’s help I was able to do myself. The minute you pass your word, I’ll go.’

‘You set great store by my promise, Matt. What is the worth of it, if what you say be true?’

‘It is worth that to me, that I never knew you break it. Give it, and I’ll lave you to yourself.’

‘Take it then, in Heaven’s name! But if you know what pity means, never speak to me again of her.’

‘I never will, after I have said my say out now. Only one word’—as Maurice’s brow grew stormy, with the pain and misery he had struggled to suppress—‘and, if what I say don’t stir your heart, I’ll never seek to meddle with you more. You talk of going away, because you can’t stand to face Clarence Grace, nor the captain, nor your mother; but, in all that, it is plain to be seen that you think more of yourself, than of poor Miss May. It is a bitter hardship to you, no doubt, to find that she is your sister; but it seems to me, that her bein’ so makes it all the worse for you to desert her in her need. Ah! that is a new notion for you, is it? Well, here it is, as large as life. Percy Grace isn’t long for this world. At the best of times he isn’t one to bear up against trouble, and the shock of findin’ what must soon come to light, for some-

thing must leak out, let them keep it ever so close, is sure to kill him outright; and then who is to look after poor little Miss May? If you, that is a man, and a mighty great hero, hasn't the pluck to stand up, and meet him that your father wronged, how is it to be expected of a weak little creature of a girl, that has never known the breath of sorrow, till it came to her along with you? That's all I've got to say to you; but if I haven't proved that it is your duty to stand by her, and to back her up agin all the world, you haven't a man's heart in your buzzum, for all you are so good a hand at makin' a moan.'

A new idea it in good truth was, and a heavy one; for beneath it Maurice staggered as though smitten with a blow.

His duty to stand by, and to shelter this hapless girl from the torrent of shame that soon must overwhelm her! to take upon himself the whole burden of the opprobrium of the crime he had vainly striven to redeem!

If this were duty, and to doubt it, once suggested, was to gainsay the creed in which he was nurtured, then 'steep and thorny' was indeed the path to Heaven; and not to be trodden save by the aspiring ones, who bore 'Excelsior' deep graven on their hearts.

Coming softly back into the room, when the sunset glory had melted into twilight grey, Matt found him seated, as he had left him a long hour ago, motionless and still, as an image carved in stone.

He looked up as, candle in hand, the old man came to his side.

'You set me a hard task, Matt, but I have learned it at last.'

'It wasn't me that set it to you, *avie*; it isn't for the like of me to do that. I only opened the book, and showed you where was the right place.'

'And well fitted you are to show any man his duty, for you, at least, have faithfully done yours. And you have been a good friend to me, Matt, little as you like me; little as you had cause to like me, all my life.'

Matt's face twitched.

'That was all along of the grumpy way I had,' he said soothingly. 'I liked you well enough; though I don't deny, that for many a day I wasn't sure of you, through always fearin', that, soon or late, the bad drop would show out. It is small comfort to you on account of the *colleen*; but to know that the same blood is in your veins, that's in his, has made my heart warm to you for ever. I'd go through as much now for you, as I would for him.'

Maurice was silent.

To probe more deeply the fearful wound that no probing could cause to heal, was to inflict on himself needless torture. And for the rest, his mind once made up to go through with the task appointed him, to sustain his father's daughter through the storm from which he was powerless to screen her now, that done, what availed it to waste strength in words?

‘I was comin’ to see if I could persuade you to go quietly to your bed,’ said Matt presently, seeing that he was in no mood for speech. ‘You are fairly worn out, and you ought to take rest now, while you can get it. My head agin a wig-block, but we’ll be hearin’ news that will rouse the sleep off us, before long.’

This prognostic, like most of those indulged in by Mr Donovan, was destined to be quickly verified; for the new day was still in its early freshness, when Maurice (who, having passively acquiesced in the decision of his Mentor, had had several hours of much needed rest) was startled from a heavy slumber, by the old man shaking him with no gentle hand.

‘One of the grooms from the Chase, with a bit of a note from himself. Open it quick, and tell us the worst at once.’

The ‘worst’ was of a character to make the reader’s cheek grow very white, as with one glance he took it in:—

‘Come to me instantly here, to Devereil! Percy Grace is at the point of death, and wants to see you. Make no delay.

‘C. E.’

CHAPTER IV.

BUT it is time that we should return to the doctor, whose movements we have left unchronicled, while listening to the tale of guilt, the grim catastrophe apportioned to be the sequel to which, he is hasting onward in the desperate effort to avert.

Desperate indeed ! and no more desperate than unavailing, as his first inquiry on reaching Deverell, made plain beyond shadow of doubt.

James Cronin was dead ! So far he learned from the lodge-keeper, in the grievous minute of waiting, during which the man stood fumbling with the lock. How, or under what circumstances, he did not pause to question ; as, the gates swinging slowly apart, he plunged forward, and at risk of bodily harm to his informant, tore at headlong speed up to the house.

In the hall he encountered Jenkins, his air of staid decorum ruffled, as never before he had seen it ; although Jenkins, like meaner mortals, had had his fair share of the ups and downs of life.

‘ I am glad to see you able to come, sir ; though there was nothing could be done from the first.

The strange doctor, the great Dublin man that is stopping at Lord Tamworth's, was here within two hours after it had happened; but he did no more than shook his head when he had seen him, and went away again. The breath was just in him then, and no more.'

His wild ride for life through the fierce heat of the sultry August afternoon, had not tended to calm the doctor's agitation; and it was with difficulty he could so command himself, as to speak without betrayal of any of the conflicting emotions by which he was rent.

'The breath just in him,' he repeated mechanically, 'tell me what has happened, Jenkins. I know nothing more than that the wretched man is dead.'

'Dead he is, God save us!' replied Jenkins fervently, all of dignity that he had been struggling to maintain, succumbing to native homeliness, in presence of the doctor's horror-bound face. 'But come into the dining-room, sir, and take a glass of wine, or something, before you go to look at him. The sight of him will give you a turn, else, that you won't be the better of for a week.'

Passively, the doctor followed him down the silent hall, and into the dining-room; where by the same window at which yesterday he had stood, battling so feebly for the hapless wretch, whom his supineness had assisted to betray, he sank down to a seat, unmanned and shuddering, well-nigh conscience-stricken, as with the sense of being a sharer in a murderer's guilt.

'Tell me what has happened, Jenkins. But first, where is Sir Hugh?'

'In his own room, sir, where he shut himself up immediately after the inquest. I never seen any one take on so fearful, sir. He is ten year an older man than when you saw him last.'

'There has been an inquest already, then? Do not stand waiting for me to cross-question you, man! but tell what you have got to tell, straight off.'

Telling a story 'straight off,' was not Jenkins' forte, his style savouring of the parenthetic and discursive, so largely affected by his class. But at last the thing was done; and the doctor put in possession of the facts, which, however gravely suspicious in detail, when viewed by the light of those other facts of which already he was master, yet in the main went far to falsify his wild conclusion; to prove that *murder*, although perhaps plotted, had unquestionably *not* been achieved.

'I told you yesterday, sir, how he had tore in here last night like a madman, and had made for the master's study; and how when I proffered to lend a hand to quiet him, the master would not hear of it, but said that he could manage him himself.'

'Well, yesterday, while you were in the house, he was quiet enough. But you hadn't been gone an hour, when he broke out into his tantrums again; and with that the master comes out of the room from him, and calls me aside, and says how he would be obliged to me if I'd come up-stairs, and

sit awhile in the outside room, so as to be within call, for that the German man, Mr Krantz, was beginning to tire of the work ; and that for his own part, he didn't like the thought of being left alone with Mr Cronin, without some one was at hand, in case he happened to want help.

'He spoke noble and affable as usual; which I'll say for him, that if he have his faults, it's not to them that eats his bread he shows them, which I take to be no part of a gentleman, but to his own equals, that can call him to an account if they choose; and said how sorry he was that he had been short with me the night before, but that the reason for it, over and above his being put out at being disturbed, was that Mr Cronin had warned him that he was subject to them fits, which turns out not to be the horrors after all, but another sort that it seems is in the family; and had asked Sir Hugh, if ever he chanced to be by when one of them took him, not to let a soul come near him that he could help; for that he might let out things in his ravings, that he would not care to have any one know but an old friend.

"That is why I pressed Mr Krantz into the service," says he, "he being so deaf, that he could catch no more than an odd word. But I am willing to trust to you, Jenkins," says he, "which you have been so long in the family, and have ever shown yourself trusty and regardful, and will respect my friend's secrets, the same as if they were my own. And I am going to write to Dr Egan," says he, "to ask him to lose no time in coming to see him ;

and I mean to despatch the letter by Mr Krantz, in hopes that the ride may put him into good humour, and make him ready to take his turn again at watching, when he comes back."

'I said no more than that I was beholden to him for his good opinion, and would do my endeavour to keep up to it. And with that I followed him up-stairs, and he set me down in the little outside room, having the dressing-room between it and Mr Cronin's, and went in himself to Mr Cronin, so as to let Mr Krantz go off with the letter to you.

'All the time Krantz was away, things were quiet enough, save that every now and again I could hear Mr Cronin muttering; and once he took to screeching at the top of his voice for help, and calling out that he was going to be murdered, so that the master opened the door, and made believe as if he was going to call in me. And after that I heard a sound like sobbing, which made it plain to me that he was fairly out of his mind; and at last, nearing eight o'clock, back comes Mr Krantz with a note from you, and——'

'Drunk?' questioned the doctor laconically.

Jenkins looked rather scandalized.

'Well, sir,' he replied judicially, 'that is not so easy to say. What with spectacles, and a foreign language, and being lame at the best of times, one has not many signs to go by; but I should decidedly say *not* drunk, judging by what I saw. And, moreover, if he had been drinking, it is not likely that Sir Hugh would have

left him in charge, and gone off himself to the Admiral's, as he did the minute he had read your note.'

'Go on, go on!' exclaimed the doctor, as the narrative came to a stand-still. 'He went to the Admiral's you say. What next?'

'He had ordered the gig to be ready waiting; and, as soon as he had read your note, he got in, and Tracy driving him, and set off, leaving word that if you came while he was away, sir, you were to be brought up to see Mr Cronin on the spot.

'It was past eleven when he came home, and the first thing he asks is, had you come, and when I answered "No," he looked very serious, and said it was a heavy charge he had taken on him, and that he wished you were there. And then I made bold to repeat, what one of the grooms had just been up to tell me, how Mr Maurice had met with an accident, and had been seen going into your house, with his hands and face covered with blood; and how, if it was true that he was so bad as that, you would not be likely to leave him to come to any one else.

'He said nothing on hearing that, but went up-stairs to Mr Cronin; and, after a while, he comes down again—I was below at the time, for Krantz had said he could do without me—and told me that all was quiet for the night, for that Krantz had persuaded Mr Cronin to lie down, and that he had fallen asleep. Then he gave me directions for the carriage to be

brought round by five in the morning, for that he would wait no longer on the chance of your being able to come, but would do what he had promised the Admiral, and that was to take Mr Cronin direct off to London, and leave him in the care of a great mad-doctor there; and that he meant to catch the seven o'clock train at E——, that would bring him on to Dublin with least loss of time.

'I did as he told me, and was then thinking of getting to my bed, when he comes down again, looking real pale and harassed, and asked me would I mind sitting up the night, for that Mr Krantz was a bit cranky, and had said he would not do a turn unless he had me to take a hand with him at a game of cards; and that it would not do to cross him, and he wanting his help.

'Of course I went up without a second word; and me and the German settled ourselves comfortable in the outside room, the master throwing himself on the sofa in the dressing-room, wrapped in his cloak, to get an hour's rest. And what with our pack of cards, and our pipes, and our whiskey, for nothing less would answer Mr Krantz, I am bound to admit we passed the time pleasant enough; though not to say very conversable, seeing that we never exchanged a word, by reason of his having little or no English, and me fearing to speak above my breath.

'About two o'clock, Krantz went in to take a look at Mr Cronin; and, finding him all right,

came back. And after that we kept on at our game for another hour or so ; when all of a sudden, and me in the act of turning a trick, the only one by the same token that I had got the chance of all the evening, though mostly accounted lucky, comes an awful screech, the like I never heard before, and then a thumping sound, as if a sack of something heavy, had been tumbled down from a height. And with that up jumps the master and Krantz and me, and after one another into the inside room ; and, seeing the bed empty, and one of the windows open from above, and something white dangling from it, down-stairs with us pell-mell, and unbolts the front door, and round with us to the side of the house.

‘And there, right under the window was a heap, that you would be hard put to say whether it was a man, or no. And the master, the minute he sets eyes on it, gives a deep groan, the same as if he was going to breathe his last, and off with him in a faint on the ground ; and never came to himself for ever so long.

‘The way it had happened, was easy to see.

‘The room they had put him into, was the one that has two windows ; one of them looking to the front, where the terrace slopes up so high that the distance from above is nothing, and the other at the side, where the ground dips down all as sudden, just by the path leading to the ravine.

‘They had fastened up the front window, safe and tight, but had paid no heed to the other,

because of its having bars half way up ; and, moreover, thinking, and small blame to them, that no one, not even a madman, would dare to venture from such a height.

‘What the master thinks, as I heard him tell before the coroner, is that he may have come to his mind for a bit ; and forgetting where he was, thought maybe that he was a prisoner, and so tried to escape.

‘The only thing that puzzles me is, why, when he had the sense to think of tying a sheet to the bars, by way of a rope, he hadn’t the wit to knot another along with it, and the quilt to the end of both, and so made it long enough to reach the ground, which he could have done easy enough if he had the mind.

‘The first thing we did, was to have him carried in and laid on a bed ; and the minute Sir Hugh came to himself, he sent off to Lord Tamworth’s, where we knew that there was a strange doctor stopping, and had him here immediately ; but, as I said before, he did no more than shake his head, and away again. The breath was just in the poor gentleman then, but before the hour was out he was dead ; and then word was sent to the coroner, and the inquest and everything was got over as soon as they could. The last of the gentlemen was not long gone, sir, when you came.’

As this long-winded narrative reached its closing the doctor rose.

‘Bring me to the room where you have laid

him, Jenkins; and then tell Sir Hugh that I wish to speak to him without delay.'

Jenkins hesitated:

'I beg your pardon, sir; but indeed you ought not to go near him yet awhile. He is an awful sight, even for you that are used to the like, and you are looking this minute as white as a sheet.'

'Nonsense, man! do as I bid you, and then carry my message to Sir Hugh. Tell him that I would not trespass on him now, if I could help it, but that I cannot do so. My business with him has been already too long deferred.'

'Too long,' indeed; as the doctor realized when he stood by the dead man's side, and gazed upon the mangled form, an awful sight past question, even to him, to whom death in its every ghastly aspect was familiar; doubly awful, because of the grievous consciousness, that the power to save had been in his hands, and had been betrayed.

True, the tale to which he had just listened, had disabused him of the dread idea, that the ill-starred wretch had been done to death advisedly.

True, he had died by his own act. But yet his was not the death of the suicide; of the reckless ones, or the crime-haunted, or the life-wearied, who alike seek the shelter of the grave.

Plainly, he had met his doom in the attempt, and that no idle nor insane one, to escape from the hands of the man, whom, erroneously or otherwise, he must have suspected of a design, if not to murder, at least to entrap him, as together they had entrapped another. Plainly, he had been

goaded to the rash endeavour by threats, which, had Sir Hugh Grace but known yesterday, that his secret was no longer in the keeping of his accomplice only, he must have seen how utterly futile it was for him to make.

Ay! there was the sting! there the barbed point that, skilled surgeon though he was, the doctor could not pluck from out his own wound; which must rankle in it many a day, an admonitor to him, to trust less in the future, to his much-prized fearlessness, and strength of will.

Had he but spoken yesterday, but steeled himself to confront, in character of accuser, the haughty gaze of the man, whom even then he had believed to be a criminal, he had in the act removed from him the temptation to shelter one foul deed behind another; had rescued this hapless creature from the snare, in seeking unaided to escape from which, he had rushed, desperate and impenitent, into the presence of his God.

‘Now at least there shall be no more temporizing,’ thought the doctor wrathfully, his frank-tempered hatred and scorn of the duplicity of which he had been the victim, blinding him for the moment to the fact that, for his children’s sake, he had bound himself to warn and aid Sir Hugh. ‘I will go to him now, and tell him that he might have spared himself the trouble of bamboozling me, for that I knew already all, perhaps more than all, that this miserable tool of his had power to betray.’

Something of the substance of what is expressed

by the vulgar saying anent 'locking the stable when the horse has been stolen' flashed across him, as often in our solemnest and most pain-fraught moments, thoughts commonplace, sordid, grotesque even, are apt to crowd upon us one and all; and unconsciously he answered it aloud, as though replying to an actual remark.

'It is not so. I must speak now, not to humiliate or crush him, but to warn him that the knowledge of his secrets has not died out with James Cronin. It would be but poor charity to spare him now, and leave him to learn the truth by-and-by, from his brother or from Arthur Wylde; and besides, if I do not speak now I may again lose courage. Once poltroon enough to shirk an obvious duty, how can I answer that I will not do it a second time?'

Replacing the covering, which he had taken from the dead man's face, he was about to quit the room, when Jenkins made his appearance.

'The master says, will you have the goodness to step up to him in his dressing-room, sir. He is so shaken that he don't feel able to come down.'

The dressing-room door had already closed behind him, Sir Hugh's cold hand had for the instant clasped, and then quickly relinquished his, when the doctor suddenly remembered, that he was powerless to speak the intended warning; that his lips were still sealed by his oath to Woodward, from which nothing that had since transpired, had given him authority to set himself free.

For some moments, as this palpable fact (lost sight of amid the perturbations of those many hours past, when one fresh discovery treading close on the heels of another, had tended to resolve his mental part to a state of chaos, wherein old and new impressions were for the nonce entangled) forced itself upon him, the doctor looked far the guiltier one of the pair; rather he looked the only guilty one, for Sir Hugh, though very pale, was perfectly self-possessed, with as little in his bearing to stamp him a criminal, as in the days so lately ended, when he stood forth, to the doctor's mind, the true type of the *grand seigneur*; his pride more to be divined than cavilled at, tempered, as it was, by highest breeding, which in him had the effect of the desire to please.

‘This is a very awful thing, Doctor Egan.’

‘Awful indeed.’

There was a pause, during which Sir Hugh resumed his seat, while the doctor moved to the window and stood gazing out, his eye abstractedly taking in the same stretch of landscape, that yesterday had whispered smilingly of how fair a heritage it formed part; his mind meantime on the rack, in the vain endeavour to discern what course was now open to him to pursue.

‘It would be mere hypocrisy to affect to be more than shocked at this terrible casualty,’ said Sir Hugh at length, finding that his visitor’s habitual command of language had for the time deserted him. ‘At the best, poor Mr Cronin’s antecedents were not such as to render him an

acquisition to the society of the neighbourhood; but worse far, for himself at least, the unhappy man was mad. He had told me that he was subject to attacks, which, as described by him, I set down as the result of a life of drunkenness and excess, but yesterday undeceived me; yesterday proved to me beyond doubt, that I was dealing with a madman. Had he lived, he would probably have been ere long the inmate of a lunatic asylum, for men of his stamp, and at his age, are rarely found to be good cases, I should think. The one thing to be deeply regretted is, that his having survived old Mrs Cronin has given him power to inflict a permanent injury on Maurice; for his first act on hearing my report of his son, and unfortunately I fear we should fail in any attempt to prove that he was not *then* of sound mind, was to sign a will disinheriting him, and leaving the property to Admiral Cronin. I feel almost as much concern for this, as though it had happened to my own son; nevertheless I must say, that the young man has to blame his own obstinacy alone.'

But at this the doctor found his tongue:

'Maurice Cronin should be flattered by your persistent doubts of his veracity, Sir Hugh. We are all well aware, that he long since declared his determination to renounce the Glenmore inheritance. I had myself the honour to be the one to communicate the intelligence to Admiral Cronin, and in your presence too; as you may possibly recollect.'

'Perfectly, Dr Egan; but, if you please, we

will not discuss the question further. At the same time allow me to assure you, as his oldest friend, that I regret this solely on Maurice's own account; and that his want of fortune shall be no obstacle to——'

The slightest possible contraction of the brows, the scarce perceptible change in the tint of the pallid cheek, proved to the eyes of the now intent listener, that the words were not produced without an effort; though, after a momentary halt, Sir Hugh went steadily on:

'I have never affected to be a loving father, sir; but yet I trust that I am neither a mercenary nor a tyrannical one. If my daughter and the son of—my dead friend, deem a union essential to their happiness, want of fortune shall be no obstacle. Make what use you please of this communication, Dr Egan. It might be as well that you should set Captain Cronin right with regard to the view I take of this matter; as I fear that, from my manner towards him the last time I saw him, he may conclude that I was incensed at his having addressed my daughter without my permission. If he thinks this, however, he is mistaken, for my anger at the moment proceeded from a totally different cause.'

Yesterday the doctor had inly shuddered, when even remotely this subject had been hinted at.

To-day he forgot to shudder, forgot to do aught but stare, in the intensity of the surprise, with which this strange address held him rooted to the spot.

Sir Hugh Grace actually offering, and, through him, too, to bribe Maurice Cronin! proffering his daughter's hand as the price, for which he might exact that they should condone the crime, of which it was simply impossible, that through any means short of miraculous, he could have learned that they were cognisant!

What unintended avowal might have escaped him, had the faculty of speech not again deserted him, matters not; for ere one word could rally to the rescue, the door leading to Sir Hugh's bed-chamber, from view of which it chanced that he stood hidden by a tall Indian screen, was thrown open, and with a—

‘D—n it, master! I’ll stand this no longer, unless you order up Daddy Jenkins with more whiskey, and a deck of cards. I’d not ask better value for one while, than to see the look of the prim old boy, when, one game after another, the best trumps would keep sticking to my hand like——’

With this astonishing preface, delivered in English, which in accent and pronunciation smacked unmistakeably, *not* of the Teuton, but of the Celt, Mr Krantz, the scientific German, divested alike of his nationality and his spectacles, reeled unsuspectingly into the room!

It had needed some such electric shock to rouse the doctor from his stupor; but roused he was, and that most thoroughly, as, springing forward, before the new-comer could think of beating a retreat, he seized him in a vice-like grasp.

‘By the Lord! I might have known it.’

With one hand holding him prisoner, with the other he clutched at the foreign-cut, trim dark wig; and plucking it off, disclosed to view the round bullet head, and close-cropped grizzled red locks, of—Mr Joseph Grimes!

Forewarned though he had been, from the moment when Cronin’s threats had been reported to him, the doctor staggered as if beneath a blow, when suddenly thus brought face to face with the living proof of the crime, of which, whether as accomplice or perpetrator, Woodward’s arch enemy stood now confessed.

‘Ruffian! murderer!’ he gasped hoarsely.

With main strength he forced him down upon a seat, and stood over him, panting and revengeful; all the horror, the righteous wrath which he had striven to stifle in dealing with May’s father, reawakening to assert its sway.

‘Ruffian! murderer!’ he repeated.

But Mr Grimes, though considerably taken aback, though startled by the suddenness of the attack, to such an extent as to be effectually sobered on the instant, was by no means an individual to be easily cowed down; as he himself would state the case, ‘wasn’t the chap to stand any d——d nonsense, when once he saw that a thing was likely to go beyond a joke.’

With strength at least equal to his captor’s, he coolly disengaged himself, and rose to his feet:—

‘Stow all that, master,’ he said sulkily; ‘and don’t call bad names till you know who you are

talking to. Perhaps I am a *ruffian* according to your showing; I won't quarrel with you for *that*. But as to murder! there is no more blood on my hands than there is on your own; not so much maybe, for that matter, unless you differ from some doctors that I could name.

'I'll tell you what it is,' he went on less doggedly, after a heavy pause, during which the doctor's gaze had travelled from his face to that of Sir Hugh, now altered to a livid, leaden mask, to which the burning eyes alone gave the semblance of a thing endued with life; 'I am main sorry that this has happened, for barrowknight there was behaving like a gentleman, though d——d slow about squaring accounts, which isn't pleasant, when a man is waiting for his own. Anyhow, the delay was no fault of his; and once I'd have seen the colour of his money, I'd have been as true to him as I was to old Ashlin, so far as not blabbing goes; but when it comes to fitting your neck to a halter, that is a bird of another breed altogether. That is what I'm not going to risk, for all the gold in the bank; so I tell you now plain and plump, that if you want to see the man that sent a bullet through Doctor Purcell, there he sits before you; and I had no more hand in it, either planning or doing, than the child that hasn't seen the light.'

Again the doctor's eyes sought Sir Hugh's face, but for a moment only. In the next he drew them away, chilled by the awful tale he read there, and fixed them on the accuser, subdued to almost civility now, as though the scene in which he sud-

denly found himself an actor, was not without its influence even upon him.

‘Is this true? Can you prove it?’

Mr Grimes’ eyes twinkled unpleasantly.

‘Catch me trusting myself in a trap like this, unless I could. I can prove it ready enough, but only to them that has the right to ask me. I don’t see what gains I’d have by overing it beforehand to you.’

The doctor made one rapid step forward with hand uplifted, then stopped short.

‘Prove it to me this instant; and then, take your price and go.’

‘Ah, that is something like sense! As to the proofs themselves, I am not such a fool all out as to carry them along with me, thinking that barrowknight might maybe fancy to pay for them in some other coin than gold. But I can tell you enough to make you cease misdoubting me; and for the papers themselves, I’ll not ask to touch a penny of your money, until *they are safer in your hands, than they were once in young Cronin’s*. I cannot say fairer than that.’

The doctor started, the recollection of the pocket-book, and of Maurice’s deep repugnance to part with it, coming, vividly as the scene of the moment, to his mind.

‘Speak low, I tell you. You are shouting so that you can be heard a mile off.’

He crossed to the door by which he had entered, and locking it, thrust the key into his pocket, and came back to his place.

He cast no thought on that second door leading into Sir Hugh's bedchamber, which, sheltered by the tall screen, still lay open as when Grimes had staggered through it; though even had he remembered, it is likely he would have left it still unheeded, knowing that other ingress to Sir Hugh's apartments save what it afforded, there was none except through those of his son.

'Now?'

'Now *what*? You know so much more than you let on to already, that I can't tell where I must begin.'

'You say that Sir Hugh Grace shot Doctor Purcell. How did you come to know it?'

'Because I was peeping in through the cabin window, when the shot was fired; and because I seen him come in and turn the dead man's pockets inside out, searching for the pocket-book, that I had buttoned up safe in my waistcoat all the time. I might not have been sure of him only he was so thoughtful that he carried a little lanthorn, and struck a light before he began, so as to let me get a good look at him. It was barrow-knight and no mistake; and he looked about as cheerful, and with as prime a colour in his face as there is in it now, and——'

With a frightful imprecation on his lips, Sir Hugh half rose, then again sank back, covering his face with his hands.

'None of your rascally jeers!' said the doctor savagely: 'Tell what you have got to tell in few words, and at once.'

‘That will bring me soonest at an end anyhow, so here goes.

‘I had been close on sixteen years with old Ashlin, with little or nothing to do but to manage Woodward; and in all that time I had never been able to make out who Woodward was.

‘It was easy to see that he was some one particular, for the old chap never so much as tried to come over me, with any story of his being real mad, but just told me to mind my own business, and not to go pimping and prying, and that he would pay me handsome for my pains.

‘I don’t deny all the same that I tried pimping, and pummelling too, for that matter, to see and knock the secret out of Woodward, but to no use.

‘I think it was out of contrariness, that he kept it so tight. It couldn’t be to please old Ashlin, nor yet out of fear of him, for Ashlin and me put no cap nor cloak on it, that it was our intentions to drive him mad in earnest; and it is many’s the dodge, by the same token, we took up with to do it, till at last we got tired, and determined to leave him in future to himself.

‘Anyhow, at the end of all these years, I was no wiser than when I had set out, when all of a sudden, Ashlin dies; and, just as I was thinking that I could rummage the place to my liking, for I was right-hand man, with no one to say again me whatever I chose to do, down comes Doctor Purcell, and makes himself master over everything, and puts a stopper on my plan at once.

'It is my opinion he saw from the first that all was not square; though, 'cute enough, he never let on to have any doubts of me. But by degrees he slipped Woodward from under my care, and I could see plainly that he set people of his own to watch me; and that when he was away from the place, which was five days in the seven, being taken up going to and from Dublin on business, his own man kept so close a look-out on Ashlin's rooms, that, barring you could creep through the keyhole, you had no chance of getting inside.

'At the end of a few weeks Woodward managed to escape, *how* I never could make out, any more than *where* he got himself to; though, as I was telling barrowknight no later ago than ere yesterday morning, when we came upon missy, and the young captain in the wood, it was my belief, that you and that same promising boy of yours, could have helped me to a guess if you liked.

'I need not waste my breath, Doctor Egan, with telling you what you know already, that I saw through your little game from the first. Not that I saw to the bottom of it, as I told young Cronin, plain and plump, the day that he up and gave me such jaw; and for that matter I admit I haven't got to the bottom of it since. But I saw enough, to prove that you were bent on getting the upper hand of me; so, to be even with you, I hung about the place, holdin' on to the asylum all the while, so as not to lose a chance of picking up a clue.

'That went on till the day that Purcell called

on you. I would never have breathed a word to him if you had not got me cornered ; but you and young Cronin together, was one too many for me, and dreading that if once Woodward slipped through my fingers, the secret, even if I could get at it, mightn't be worth a *traneen*, I up, and told Doctor Purcell all my notions, not knowing at the time what better I could do.

'I watched him inside the house, and then stretched myself behind the paddock wall, and waited till it grew dark, when I crept close up to the parlour window and tried to listen ; and by-and-by Purcell goes away, and before long up comes young Cronin, and gets in, and after a bit, out with him again upon the doorstep, and you along with him, as obstinate as an old pig at a crossroads, and talking so loud that I could hear you above the storm, and sends him off to give the packet to Purcell without delay.

'He had not gone far till I overtook him, and laid him by the roadside ; then, with the pocket-book safe in hand, off with me to the Fowler, and into my own room, and reads every word of them papers right through.

'I won't tell you what I learned from them, for if I did, I'd spoil your pleasure in reading them, which would not be fair, considering what they will cost you.

'The upshot of it was, that I was out again in no time, and off to the cabin at Prior's Pass ; where, as I have just been telling you, I was peeping through the window, when I heard the

shot fired, and saw Sir Hugh Grace come in and strike a light, and turn Purcell's pockets inside out searching for the papers, and when he couldn't find them, out again looking so like a devil that he frightened me, which is a thing that few men has ever done.

'He had come up to the cabin door, and had lifted the latch; and after a word or two that I could not overhear, by way, I suppose, of finding if he had the right man inside, and if he was within reach,—it was so dark that you couldn't see an inch before you,—had fired, and had done for him with the one shot.'

Absorbed, as by this time were both listener and narrator, it had escaped the ears of either, that a step had silently crossed the room within, and as silently halted at the threshold of the open door; where now, with blanched lips and dizzy, unbelieving brain, stood Percy Grace, listening spellbound, as awhile past poor May had listened to another such, to the revelation, which spoke his death-warrant in so many words.

'He was no sooner gone,' continued the ruffian coolly, 'than I went in and helped myself to Dr Purcell's keys, and to what valuables he had about him, and then hid him away snug in a corner; not wanting him to be found, if I could hinder it, until I had had as long a start as I might want.'

'I had made up my mind on the minute, what I would do.'

'The papers gave me hold enough over his

lordship here already, and what I had seen, made it double as strong. But over and above the damage it would be to my character, to be mixed up with the likes, I knew that I would make a deal more by squeezing Sir Hugh Grace at my own convenience, than by turning informer, which is not half profitable enough for such a dirty trade. And, moreover, I had no sooner set my eyes on the keys, than I remembered where there was a lob of money lying in Purcell's safe, that I——'

'Hold! I want to know nothing of your proceedings. Where are the papers? and what is your price for giving them up, and taking yourself off for life?'

Grimes chuckled.

'What is my price,' he repeated slowly, 'for them papers, that can prove that barrowknight here, kept his brother a prisoner in a madhouse, for fear lest any one should find out, that he had no more right to be Sir Hugh Grace than——'

'Stick to the point, man! The papers, and your price?'

'The price Sir Hugh Grace was to pay for them papers, and that he kept me cooped up here, waiting till he could raise it in a lump, which was the only way I'd have it from him; the price was five thou——'

He stopped short abruptly, as Sir Hugh suddenly rose erect, and striding across the apartment, with one sweep of his arm threw down the heavy screen; which, toppling against him, swiftly

though he strove to elude it, brought the miscreant to the ground in its fall.

The father's ears had been first to catch the heart-broken wail, which told him that God's vengeance was indeed consummated; that his last stay on earth was being stricken from his grasp. The father's eyes were first to behold the fragile form, as it swayed helplessly towards him, ere this, his latest victim, the child for whom he had sinned so deeply, sank down, the life-blood welling from his pale lips, insensible at his feet.

* * * * *

That there are shocks, many and diverse in their natures as are the characters of those destined to sustain them, any one self-deluded enough to turn essayist, might, with but trifling expenditure of brain-power, quickly prove; shocks that stupefy, shocks that madden, shocks that kill; shocks again, that arouse the dormant energies of the torpid and the pleasure-bound, transforming the sluggard, the Sybarite of yesterday, into the hardy soldier, the fiery zealot of to-day. Lastly, shocks that sober and make steady on the instant; that clear the dulled brain, and restore the perturbed mind to its just balance, be the influence that has numbed or shaken what it may.

To such a shock as of these last named did Maurice owe it, that when he obeyed the doctor's summons, he bore about him but slight trace of the dire conflict, through which he had passed so lately; that outwardly, at least, he was again the

thorough soldier, quick to rally from the fiercest encounter, to plunge again into the thickest of the fight to rescue others, though himself already wounded to the death.

It was well that it was so, for the tidings that awaited him, the scenes in which he was thus suddenly called to bear a part, were of a character to test the strength and fortitude of the most enduring; as one look at the doctor's face, solemn and awe-hushed as he had never before seen it, told him without need of words.

Sir Hugh Grace, the father from whom disgrace was his sole heritage, smitten in the fruition of his evil schemes, in the hour wherein success seemed certain, with the dreary curse to which he had vainly striven to subject his victim! Percy, the sweet-tempered, winsome comrade, the brother, loved with more than a brother's love, dying! paying with his sad young life, the sin-shadowed life that had yielded him so little joy, the price of a parent's guilt. May, his sister May, alone in her awful desolation; with no kindred thing to whom to turn for strength or comfort save him, to whom to act a brother's part, for even a briefest season, was punishment more bitter tenfold than to die.

'I would not have sent for you, but that he implored to see you,' concluded the doctor, when with locked doors, and in hurried whispers, he had told over his tale, 'but now that you are here, will you try to stand by me, for, God's truth, my

boy! I never felt so thoroughly shaken, so much in want of help, as I do this day.'

'I will do my best. Let me go to him before it is too late.'

At the door of Percy's room the doctor stopped.

'I sent last night to the Tower for the two girls. I thought it only right that they should see him, and she is with him now, Maurice. He insisted that she should be with him while he spoke to you.'

Maurice drew back, his haggard face flushing darkly.

'You do not mean that *I* am to be the one, to tell him *that* ?'

'To tell him *that* ! Are you mad ? To tell him *that*, would be to scare the little remaining life out of him. It is because he knows nothing of it, that he wants to speak to you. Nay, my poor fellow !' as Maurice clutched at his arm for support, and clung to it, the flush dying greyly from his cheek, 'you must go through with this now. You are too good a soldier to desert your colours at a pinch.'

Still holding on by the friendly arm, the young man entered the sick room, a mist-wrapped chamber it seemed to him, wherein a thousand whirring noises fought for mastery ; and presently the closing of a door told him that the doctor had departed, and the mists clearing suddenly, he saw himself standing by the bed, while at the other side knelt May, her golden head bowed down, all sound else on the instant merged in that of the

convulsive sobbing, in which the tearless anguish of despair had at length found voice.

Very gently he bent, and touched the cheek of the dying man, whiter now than the pillow on which it lay.

‘Thank God, I am in time!’

With an effort Percy moved one frail hand, and laid it upon his.

‘Has the doctor told you what I——’

‘He has told me everything. Do not speak.’

‘I must speak. She——’

He strove to draw May towards him, by the hand she held clasped in hers, but the effort was too much for him; and with a feeble moan he desisted, his eyes, as he raised them, wild and appealing, speaking his purpose in a language, to which Maurice, steeled now to endure to the uttermost, dared not close his heart.

Quickly crossing round to the other side of the bed, he bent over the kneeling girl, and placed his arm round her.

‘You wish to hear me promise, that I will be true to her while I live, Percy? You know I will be that.’

With a last, fitful flickering up of life and strength, Percy half raised himself, his voice, faint and husky when he had first spoken, coming firm and clear now.

‘She says that she cannot be your wife, for that my father’s crime has parted you, but it must not be so. She says this because the curse of our pride is clinging to her still, and she will not

have you share in the ruin that has come upon us. But she is alone in the world now, Maurice, and she has got but you, and you must not listen to her. Take her hand in yours, and promise that—O God! are you too going to desert her? Have I trusted you, only to find you——’

He had passed, young as he was, through many a trying ordeal, had stood the shock of many a rude encounter, wherein men, neither coward nor weakly, had been worsted by his side, yet never had our hero borne aught like this; never lived through a like moment, when, with seared brain, and heart as dry as dust, he had to hold himself calm and steadfast, and to think; had to coin a phrase, in which to palm off a lie upon the dying; had to speak words of promise which he might keep but to the ear only, while in substance, in the spirit in which the listener took in their meaning, they must be false, as were ever uttered by the fiend.

With one hand still clasping May, he laid the other on Percy’s lips, as the poor fellow lay back, spent and breathless upon his pillow.

‘Hush, Percy! Be calm, or you will kill yourself. What have I said or done that you should doubt me, when——’

‘The look upon your face! You looked as if you would shrink from—no, no! not from *her*, but from the shame that——’

‘It was a lying look!’ said Maurice sharply. ‘Every shame and sorrow that is hers, is mine too, and I mean to bear my full share of them.’

See! I take her hand in mine, as you bid me, and I promise that I will be true to her, as ever brother was to sister; as true as you could be to her if you lived. I promise too, Percy, that the—the crime that has—murdered you, shall be no barrier between us; and that nothing she can urge, shall ever have power to turn me from my purpose, to watch over her while I live. Will this content you? Will you die in peace, Percy, trusting her to me now?’

He waited for no answer, but, lifting the fainting girl in his arms, bore her from the chamber to the outer one, where sat Nina and the doctor, in expectation of a summons to give aid; and that done, stood looking on, quiet and undemonstrative, while the pair busied themselves in efforts to revive her from the swoon, from which, had hope still had existence in his bosom, it might be said he almost *hoped*, that she should never more emerge.

And presently the doctor, made nervous, loudly as he would have scoffed at the imputation, by the presence of such a stony witness, made a sign to Nina; promptly obedient to which, Nina rose from where she was kneeling beside May, and leaving him to pursue his task unaided, slipped her arm through that of Maurice, and drew him, passive and unresisting, back to the death-chamber, that together they might keep watch there to the end.

CHAPTER V.

IT was at sundown, almost the same hour at which yesterday he had received his death-blow, that Percy left them, sinking to his sleep as painlessly as an infant on its mother's breast; his hands clasped in those of the woman whom he had loved with such rare fidelity; the face that had made the glory of his life's brief morning, the last thing earthly that met his gaze.

Of the experiences of the heavy days that followed, it is doubtful if, of the four who had gathered round that death-bed, any one could have given a clear, connected narrative; though of the lessons which such dark days are ever potent to teach, lessons of which the majority of those who jostle each other on the world's great highways, seldom pause to grasp more than the surface-meaning, it is no rash thing to aver that, unknowingly, they well-nigh fathomed the deepest wisdom, as the tenor of their after lives could be shown to prove.

To Maurice, especially, although the part allotted to him was one that in the acting tried him cruelly, the experience of those days was

fraught with all that was most beneficial; as later on and in a calmer mood he could willingly admit.

He had come here with his heart full of hatred and bitterness towards the unhappy woman, whose weakness he had, by brooding over it, already monstered to the magnitude of the blackest crime; had come sternly resolved to abandon her, tender mother and faithful though she had ever been to him; to hold aloof from her, so that she should never more behold him; to leave her, with remorse for her sole portion, in punishment of the wrong which she had inflicted upon him.

He had come fully resolved on this; arguing with himself, if indeed such fevered ramblings could be called arguments, that not to do this would be to accept degradation as his birthright; to forego even the scant measure of justice, which was all that he could obtain.

Kneeling by Percy's death-bed, he learned another lesson. Listening to the young man's parting words, he suffered a silent change of heart, such as no mere human agency could have effected; such as those alone experience, who in the 'mill' through which we are all passing daily, are set apart to be ground 'exceeding small.'

They were alone together, the others, in compliance with a look from the dying man, having all withdrawn; when motioning to him to bend down, for he had strength now but to speak in whispers, Percy said:

'You will be good to May for her own sake, Maurice; but I want you to promise to be tender

with my father for mine. Tell him from me if— if ever he can understand you—tell him that he is not to blame himself for what has happened to me. I could not have lived. I knew it—I always knew it. That is why I craved so desperately to have some happiness, for I knew it could not be for long, and I am glad to die, for if I lived now I should have to give her up. Do not tell him *that*; but tell him how I loved him, and that he must not grieve for me, nor think himself to blame. He was a good father to me, and always loved me dearly; and I was always a care to him, and—O God, help and forgive me! perhaps, too, the cause of his sin!’

To all this, murmured in broken whispers, the ebbing breath coming in painful gasps between, Maurice listened, not alone as he must needs have done whenever heard, in bitterest sorrow, but in an agony of humiliation of spirit, the bare remembrance of which must ever exercise a pride-subduing power, be the characteristics of him who has sustained it what they may.

Percy, the weakling, the dreamer! the man whom, not physically alone but mentally, and it might be morally too, he had ever held to be of less fire-proof metal than himself! Percy, paying with his life the forfeit of a parent’s guilt; stricken down when life shone fairest, and willing to die because that guilt must, in honour, part him from the woman whom he loved, he could be true to nature and gratitude; could, with dying lips, frame a message of peace and mercy; with dying breath crave pardon for himself, as comprehending

that love for *him*, had impelled his father on to crime.

Percy could do all this because of the love that had been lavished on him; while he, who had love tenfold truer and more unselfish to pay back, could harden his heart to wreak a cruel, unmanly vengeance on a woman, whose gravest wrong in his regard was, that she had hidden away the secret, the knowledge of which she knew must blight him; had striven to shield him from the consequences of the sin, that had made her own life one long dreary penance of terror and remorse.

‘God help her, and God forgive me!’

The ejaculation was in itself a proof that the milling process to which he was being subjected, was fairly effectual.

Two days ago, had he prayed at all, he would have reversed the order: ‘God forgive her, and God help me!’ But the times were changed, and he had shared their changes.

He had seen not Percy alone thus true to a child’s first duty; he had beheld May, turning from the bed-side of the brother who no more would need her, to devote herself to the father who, harsh and unloving through all the years, when reason had but guided him on to wrong-doing, now when its light was gone out perhaps for ever, had come to be amenable to her gentle influence; capable of being calmed, as was Saul by the harp of David, by the soothing voice of the child whom, in the last conscious hour in which they had stood face to face, he had loaded with a withering curse.

May, stricken by the same shaft that had pierced him, could do all this for duty's sake; whilst he——

‘Doctor Egan, you do not mean to let her stay with him? We have been talking of her, Nina and I; and Nina says she is dying by inches. I have watched her, too, when she could not see me, and—I cannot trust myself, or I would speak to her; but you must put a stop to it. It is awful to think of her dooming herself to such a life.’

It was the afternoon of the day, subsequent to that on which Maurice had stood by, and in his garb of chief mourner, worn humbly now as if in amends to the man whom, sheltering himself, as he must henceforth do, beneath his borrowed name from obloquy, he no longer could claim the right to hate, had seen James Cronin laid in state beside the mother, who but so lately had preceded him to the grave.

And a few hours past, he had made one of the mournful group within the sombre vault, where the Graces of many generations lay mouldering into dust; and whence no one had emerged dry-eyed, after they had laid him, who, by all save three among the number, was deemed to be virtually the last of his race, to the rest he had so prematurely sought.

And now, his two-fold part enacted, the pressure of those heavy days temporarily somewhat relaxed, he sat by the window of the study at Deverell (the same window by which Sir Hugh had stood listening, pallid but self-possessed, to the

tale, of which the narrator had little guessed the dread import), while the doctor, looking sorely harassed and worn, was busied with a certain cabinet, of the tell-tale nature of the contents of which he deemed it best to satisfy himself on the spot.

‘You will not let her stay with him?’ he repeated, after a pause, as the doctor, absorbed in his task, made no reply.

‘I’ll tell you what it is, Maurice, I will let her do exactly what she chooses. The girl’s place is with her father, and best so, at least for the present. The one blessed thing in this awful muddle is, that she will have no time to think of herself. If she had, I would not answer for her not slipping through our fingers any moment, whereas with the care of him to absorb her, she has a chance. She starts with us to-night by her own desire for London; and if the men whom I mean to consult, agree with me that the case is one for private treatment, why, in God’s name! let the child stand by him, and do her duty while she has the strength.’

‘Your plan is an inhuman one, and I protest against it! It would be far more merciful to place him in a madhouse at once, than to leave him in that man’s care. Great Heaven! sir, only think, if he should come to his senses even for a moment, and find himself in the hands of such a wretch! What right have we to make ourselves ministers of vengeance——’

‘Pooh, pooh! I did not expect to hear you talk such nonsense. Why, the luckiest thing that could befall us, was to have such a man as Grimes

ready to our hand. He is a ruffian, as he himself admits very frankly; but as to being a minister of vengeance! He is just the one man now alive besides ourselves, who knows the whole story, and so can hamper us by making no awkward discoveries; and, moreover, he has got one quality not to be met with every day. He will hold on to us like a bull-dog until we pay him his price, but he will also hold his tongue for evermore, when once he has got it; and I have met honester men in my time, of whom I would be very slow to promise so much.

'Listen to one word of advice,' he continued, coming back to the window, after he had carefully re-locked the cabinet, and sealed the lock with his ponderous seal; 'follow little May's example, Maurice. I recollect saying years ago to Arthur Wylde, that, if he would stand to his colours, as staunchly as she would to hers, there was no fear of him, and I say the same thing to you now. Go quietly home now, and kiss and make friends with that poor little woman, who is pining her heart out for a sight of you. At the very worst she only made a blunder; and it is not fair to be too hard on her for that.'

Only a blunder!

Even amid all his pained pre-occupation, Maurice was conscious of a vague sensation of amazement, at this singularly wide-minded definition, this tolerant application of a word rarely used in such a sense.

Ordinarily the good man was not prone to be

over-lenient to the sex ; was wont, on the contrary, to come down on most amiable little feminine weaknesses, with a sledge-hammer force, suggestive somewhat of the thriftless operation of 'breaking a butterfly upon a wheel.' Yet here was he speaking calmly, as of a 'blunder,' of the sin that had laid two young hearts desolate ; that had entailed on all affected by it a life-long continuance in falsehood and deceit !

'You will do this, Maurice, will you not ?' continued the doctor earnestly, blissfully unconscious of the train of thoughts that he had started. 'Matt tells me that you have sworn never to see her again, but if you keep to that, I tell you to your face, that you will do a bad, cowardly act. You owe her the same duty you ever did, for no mother could be better to a child than she has been to you ; and it is a poor return to break her heart, as I firmly believe that you are doing now.'

In the grievous turmoil of these latter days it had utterly slipped the doctor's memory, that concerning this same matter he had himself fallen temporarily into an error, into which it stood to reason that Maurice must have fallen too ; that whereas, in his own case that error had been dispelled almost immediately, with Maurice it was otherwise, and that consequently the advice thus tendered, galled a sore that had not yet even begun to heal.

'Where is Nina ?' questioned Maurice rather irrelevantly. 'I have not seen her this morning.'

'She has driven over to the Tower, with May.

May wished to say good-bye to Martha, and as Martha could not come here, through fear of you, May had to go to her. Matt insisted on driving them, I strongly suspect for the purpose of congratulating the widow on her freedom. I wish they were back, for it is time we were getting ready for our journey, and Matt never thinks anything well done unless he has a finger in it himself.'

From Matt, who, too much excited to remain quiescent, had quickly followed him to Deverell, Maurice had learned the particulars of all that had taken place; the old gentleman, in the intervals of lending a hand to everything and everybody, having found time to extract a full narrative thereof from his master, and from Grimes.

'The sort of haythens that calls themselves Christians these times, will sneer and jeer at you, if you talk of a judgment,' prefaced Matt, on the first occasion on which he and Maurice, who, holding sombrely aloof from all others, suffered the old man's companionship without reluctance, found themselves alone together. 'But what less than a judgment do you call what has happened to them two? There is Sir Hugh Grace a ragin' madman, with the same villyan for a keeper, that tried his tricks to no use on another; and there is James Cronin after killin' himself, with fright that he was caught in the same trap as he had caught Clarence in. If you mayn't call them judgments, you mayn't call your soul your own; though himself was down on me awhile ago, for sayin' the word.'

To sum up the narrative, in style less discursive than that in which Mr Donovan communicated it, all that the reader needs to know in explanation of each bygone episode, may be stated thus :

Less skilful specialists than the doctor and Grimes could have passed judgment on the case of father and son, within a brief space after the occurrence of the scene, on which we dropped the curtain in our last chapter.

'The lad will be in heaven, or near it, by this time to-morrow,' was the doctor's unspoken sentence, ere the sun had gone down upon his grief.

'Barrowknight's goose is cooked,' was Mr Grimes's verdict when, some hours having passed, the pair were closeted together, to confer on the terms of the treaty by which they would be bound. 'You bid me clap on my disguise again, master, and to stick to my part, and I've done it. I've done more, for I've took to my old trade quite natural ; which it's lucky for you that you had me at hand to do it. The man is gone mad, and is like to stay so, if I am not out in my reckoning, which is what I never was, from the day I first set foot in the 'sylum till now.'

Grimes's history of himself from the date of his disappearance from Rath-Cronan, was a simple one ; though, perhaps, lacking somewhat of the grace and charm, which things simple are credited to possess.

He had been unable to resist the temptation to rob the asylum, 'by reason,' as he frankly admitted, 'that whatever haul he might make

there, would be over and above all that he would suck out of barrowknight, by-and-by.'

His twofold purpose of securing Purcell's money, and satisfying himself that the tenant of Mangan's Quarry was *not* Woodward, safely effected, he had betaken himself over the water, with again a twofold purpose to serve; namely, to spend his windfall like a gentleman, and to mature, in gentlemanly leisure, his future plan of attack upon Sir Hugh.

'I knew that it was the best of my play to keep dark for awhile, for I had read the accounts of your doings here in the papers, and I saw how the finding the keys and the lantern, had gone close to bringing the murder home to me. And though of course I knew that I could clear myself if I was taken, still to clear myself would be to kill the goose that could lay the golden eggs, and I saw no great sport in that; so instead of risking it, I thought I'd hang about London, and enjoy life, and see with my own eyes in what the fools on the other side differed from the fools on this, keeping myself out of harm's way all the time.'

But, like many a one who rashly ventures to engage *en amateur* in philosophic investigation, Mr Grimes had the misfortune to come to grief.

Among the 'fools,' whose manners and customs he set himself to study, were a gang of coiners, who managed, cunning as he was, to befool him of his cash and of his caution; and for complicity in whose doings he was tried and convicted,

and sentenced to five years' transportation beyond the seas.

This term had expired only a few months before his return to Ireland, whither, counting that time and hardship had so altered him that, comparative stranger as he was, he could temporarily shun recognition, he had at once hastened; and, having first taken the precaution to place the papers in safe custody, had boldly come down to Deverell, arriving there only an hour or two previous to the occurrence of the accident from which he had rescued May.

Sir Hugh's statement about Grimes having waylaid him in the wood was a true one; which, we need hardly say, was *not* the case with the supplementary information he had afforded to Maurice, to the effect that he had seen the man beyond the precincts of the Chase, by break of day.

'I told him plump and fair, that my price was five thousand pounds; and seeing that it would take him some time to put his hand on so much, there being a load of money raised on the property already, by reason of the way the quality has of spending, and also Mr Cronin below having been a drag on him for years, there was nothing for it, but for me to let myself be boxed up here for a time, it being no part of our game for me to be seen abroad.'

'Boxed up' Mr Grimes had accordingly submitted to be, in the apartments where formerly Clarence Grace had been kept a prisoner, and to which, luckily for his present purpose, Sir Hugh had never allowed others to have access; and there

he had remained *perdu*, the haughty Sir Hugh himself acting as his attendant, and surreptitiously supplying his wants, until certain preliminaries to the raising of the required loan had been arranged by letter, when Sir Hugh had quitted Deverell for London, where Grimes (whom, on the night preceding his departure, he had smuggled in disguise from the house) presently joined him; and in character of Krantz, the German, was installed as one of his following, and brought back by him, as already shown, on his hurried return to the Chase.

‘We knew one another too well, to care to part company until we had finished our business together; and as I had picked up a trifle of German in my travels, and could manage to mumble a word or two on a pinch, it was settled that I was to be a German, which to make it easier I made out to be a bothered one, knowing that few would be at the trouble of talking to me, when they’d have to split the ceiling with roaring before they could make me hear a word.’

Of the scene that at the time of its occurrence had so agitated Maurice, as also of the motive that had caused Sir Hugh to act as he had done with regard to Cronin, the explanation given by Grimes was no less strange, than it was unquestionably true.

Previous to his sudden meeting with him in the library at Deverell, Grimes was of impression that Maurice was dead, having heard that he was among those killed in action in India, more than a year before.

‘Up to that I had never breathed a word to barrowknight, about the man that they had picked up out of the quarry not being his brother, for I didn’t see the use of troubling him with more than he had already on his mind, and he doing his best to behave handsome by me.

‘I knew for certain that you and young Cronin had helped the right man to escape, for I couldn’t be deceived about the moaning, any more than about the sweet dose you treated me to, doctor—I swore I’d be even with you for that, and bedad! I kept my word! And judging by the weakly state that Woodward was in when he gave us the slip, I guessed he could not have travelled far, and that the likeliest thing was, that you had got him down some way to your own house, and had him there nursing him up, till he’d get strength enough for a start.

‘Anyhow, it was all only guess work; and that was why I took to bullying young Cronin that day by the quarry, thinking to squeeze something out of you by the way of hush-money, it being my intencion, after I’d have waited for the inquest, so as to make sure of my man, to quit the place entirely; for I was getting sick and tired of my trade, by reason of its not promising to pay too well, now that Ashlin was gone.

‘From the minute I saw Sir Hugh doing the murder I troubled my head with nothing else, knowing that that one secret was worth a score of any other. And though, in thinking it over bit by bit afterwards, I got staggered in my belief

about your helping Woodward, remembering how you and the young chap had been thick with Sir Hugh's people from the first, I settled in the end that, maybe, Woodward had kept his secret to himself, which was what he was likely enough to do, after all the fright and the hardship we had put him through; and that the pair of you had been fools enough to help him, without asking to find out who he was.'

Thus it had fallen out that no suspicion that the sword impending over him was a two-edged one, that others, perhaps, already held the secret for which Cronin's reckless temper made him tremble, had ever assailed Sir Hugh until the morning of his encounter with May and Maurice; when Grimes (who on the preceding evening had had no opportunity of communicating it) had followed him out of doors, and there imparted the startling intelligence, almost on the instant of receiving which, he had suddenly found himself face to face with his daughter and her lover in the wood.

The first rude shock passed, he had taken counsel with Grimes, and scanning the subject intently, had come to accept that worthy's solution of the puzzle as the correct one; being aided to this just, though so very far-fetched conclusion, by the consideration that the doctor and Maurice, the one a mere youth, the other a man of peculiarly frank and fearless character, were the least likely people in the world to have practised cold-blooded, systematized deception; to have lived with him for

years on terms of closest friendship and intercourse, if possessed of a secret, which branded him as a traitor and usurper all in one.

So much for the origin of the scene that had shaken Maurice. Of the scheme that had resulted in the death of Cronin, the explanation was all as simple; and when viewed in the tolerant 'put yourself in his place' spirit of our latter days, found to involve but little additional guilt.

Coming back to the Chase, as described by Jenkins, wild with excitement and terror, of which Sir Hugh could but darkly guess the cause, Cronin had behaved with such extraordinary violence, had so plainly shown himself to be beyond the control of reason, as to render it natural, if not all out excusable, that any one, who had at once cause to dread and power to restrain him, should use the latter promptly, even if in a fashion from which the more scrupulous must shrink.

What followed, which, as forming our last explanatory note, must needs be rather copious, had best be told in the chief actor's words:

'Finding that he couldn't manage him himself, barrowknight comes to me, and tells me the whole story, of how the mean hound had been the one to help him to make away with the brother, and had got his pot of money for doing it; and how the same money had brought him to grief, like as mine had brought me.

'It seems that for a year or two after getting it he had gone on to his liking, and had made no end of a splash in foreign parts; and that all of a

sudden he had disappeared, and had never been heard of more, till he had served out his dozen or fifteen years in his French prison, when he cut home here, and finding no better way at hand of raising the wind, robs his old mother at Glenmore—you thought no one but yourself knew of that, doctor, but you see Mr Cronin wasn't the one to keep a secret from a friend; and then off with him like myself, with all that he could grab.

'From that till the day of his death he did nothing but drain barrowknight so dry, that there were times that he had scarce a pound he could call his own. And at last, when he finds the old woman near her end, and that he was cock sure of the property, nothing would do him but he must take it into his cantankerous head that he would turn respectable, and make his son come on terms with him, whether he would or no; and when barrowknight fails to bring the young fellow to reason, he ups and threatens to blow upon the whole concern out of sheer low spite, seeing how he had no credit either to keep or to lose, himself.

'No sooner had I heard the story, than I saw that me and Sir Hugh was in the one boat, for, as I said before, to let harm come to him, was to kill the goose with the golden eggs; and so I promised on the spot that I would help.

'He didn't want to do further mischief, for what was done already was more than he was handy enough to mend. So all that we had to plan was, how to keep Mr Cronin quiet till he could come to his senses, it being barrowknight's intentions

to marry the young chap out of hand to little missy, when the father would find it more decent, as well as more friendly, to hold his tongue in future.

‘He had been up all night with Mr Cronin, not caring to rouse me till he couldn’t help it; so he had only just finished telling the story, when, before we could hit on a likely plan, up comes old Jenkins, and tells him that you were below, and wanted to see him mighty bad.

‘I never saw a blacker look on a man’s face, than was on his when he came back.

‘He had made up his mind that I was in the right of it, and that you and the young chap must have been in the dark all along. But, however you looked or spoke that morning, you puzzled him, and put the fear of the Lord across in him; more especial when you said that whether he was sick or well, you would come back, and have a talk with Mr Cronin before night.

‘If he could have put an end to the same man then and there, and no one been the wiser, it is my belief Sir Hugh Grace would have done it without finching, for he was drove desperate among us all; which it is sorry I am now that I had any hand in it, seeing that he was a gentleman, and free-handed, and willing to pay handsome to them that helped him at a pinch. But all the same I’m bound to act fair by him now that he is as good as dead; and fairness makes me say that there was no thought of harming Mr Cronin, and that if any one is to be blamed for what happened

afterwards, that one was me; though when I said the words I only meant to give him a fright, by way of having it out with him for the shot he fired at me, the night that I stumbled as I was chasing him in the snow.

‘But to make as short a story as I can of it, here is the very worst that we planned against him.

‘After a bit, when Sir Hugh had calmed down out of his frustration, I got him to tell me, word for word, what had passed between you.

“‘Them is not the words of a man that *knows* anything for certain,” says I, after I had turned them over in my mind. “My belief is that Cronin has been bullying little missy, at least that is what I’d make out from what he has dropped, though what with his raving about sperrits, and about dead women coming to life again, it’s not much can be made out of it; and that she has taken fright, and has told the doctor what he said. Depend upon it, Doctor Egan knows nothing *for certain*, else he’d have taxed you with it on the spot, and insisted on seeing Mr Cronin in spite of you; instead of which he lets it lie over, and says he will call again by-and-by, which I take to be a friendly way of giving you a hint, that you have five or six hours to yourself to do what you think best with; and that——”’

At this point the doctor could not refrain from a mild apostrophe:

‘Why, you d—d rascal! did you dare to accuse me, of meaning to prompt the man to——’

‘Easy now, sir, or I’ll leave you to tell the story your own way. I expected better manners from you than to take me up so short.

‘Upon that, says Sir Hugh, says he :

“That may or may not be,” says he. “If this cursed meddler,” meaning you, sir, “knows anything already, it is likely that, as you say, he got his knowledge from my beloved daughter”—He got his two eyebrows together as he said that, and looked as black as the divil, and small blame to him, for if she was mine, and that she had served me such a trick, I’d soon put her past wanting anything but her clargy.—“If he knows anything, he knows it through her,” says Sir Hugh, “and for her sake he will keep it close. But if he does *not*, my mind is made up that he sha’n’t learn it from James Cronin ; and how to keep them asunder till this wretched hound”—he meant Mr Cronin and not you by that, sir—“comes to his senses, is what you and me has got to plan.”

‘I hadn’t been long casting about, when all of a sudden a gallows droll idea comes across me, of how I could do the thing handy, and at the same time pay you back in your own coin, for the cunning trick you had served me on the night we first met.

‘I mightn’t go into the ins and outs of it now, only for the fun of the joke, for of course you saw through it all double quick, when it was too late.

‘All the hand that Sir Hugh had in it was to write the letter, but that was a stiff bit of work and no mistake ; for first and foremost we had to.

throw dust in your eyes, and then to find you a job that would bring you round by your own place; and, moreover, we had to make up a good reason why I was picked out to be the messenger, which was the one thing we were fearful might look quare.

'We got it done anyhow; and when it *was* done, you won't deny but it beat cock-fighting. And then off with me to Glenmore, and into the stable-yard, where the first thing I did, after making sure that there was no one to see me, was to lame your horse—not for the mischief of it, though, no doubt, you thought it was—but only for fear that you might maybe mount, and give me the slip, and ride off to the Chase, while I was inside, seeing about properly baiting the trap.

'Yourself and that uncommon 'cute boy, Tim, played into my hands as nate as if you had been paid to do it. The pair of you left me to myself; and the minute you had turned your backs, I pulls a paper of stuff out of my waistcoat pocket, and in with it into your black bottle. And then I swallowed off what was in your tumbler, and fills it up again quite friendly, with my own brew, adding a taste of water as careful as if I was mixing for myself, and lays it ready to your hand.

'You will be after thinking, I'm afeard, that I was not brought up among teetotallers, I did the drunken man so well. The "black little thief" was that 'tossicated, so he was, that he couldn't keep his hold on the bottle, but had to let it come slap to the ground. I did that for more reasons

than for make-believe; for in the first place, I didn't want any of it to be found after me, and, moreover; Mr Tim had gone mending your glass, and I knew that you had had enough already, and that enough is as good as a feast.

'You were not long gone till I came to myself, and made a sign to them to yoke to the gig, and back with me to the Chase, well pleased that I had done the thing so easy; not that I'd have you think I was so soft, as to go depending on a paper of sleeping stuff, to keep you out of our way. If I could get no chance of dosing you, and I knew that it was only a chance at the best, I had planned that I'd follow you to your own house; and that either going or coming back I'd give you your *quietus*, in the same style as I did the young chap long ago. You needn't look at me so savage; I didn't mean to do for you entirely, no more than I did for him. But it was a settled thing and I starting, that you were not to show your nose at the Chase, till we had got clear of it; and once I hired to do a job, you might count it as good as done.

'You've got near to the end of the story now.

'As soon as I got back, barrowknight puts me in charge, and over with him to the Admiral, and frightens the old chap into fits, with a history of how his nephew was gone out of his mind, after making a will leaving the place to him; and how if young Cronin was to get wind of the state he was in, he would be for disputing the will by-and-

by, and maybe keeping the honest old gentleman out of what didn't belong to him, after all.

'The old chap fell into the trap as ready as you did, and before Sir Hugh had done more than hint the thing, he sets to praying and begging him to take him away somewhere, so that no one would be the wiser until they could see if he could be brought back to his mind; which barrowknight, though seemingly unwilling, promises to do out of friendship to the family; and then back with him to get ready for the road.

'The worst we meant to do with him was to bring him over to London, and if we could manage to give you the slip there, well and good. But, if not, we were to take him further on, and leave him in my charge, while Sir Hugh would come back, and seek to find out the lie of the land, and how much you and young Cronin knew for certain, and how much was only guess-work with you; and, according to what he found out, he was to make the best plan, and the best bargain that he could.

'For what happened afterwards, I've said already that I was the only one to blame, and I'll tell you how.

'I wanted to have it out with the ill-conditioned dog, for two reasons. One was that he had fired at me, and me not seeking to harm him; and the other was that I scorned him for not keeping to his word, when he had got paid for it, which is what every one, high and low, is bound to do. So when we were alone together, after Sir Hugh was

gone off to the Admiral's, I up and told him who I was, and how I was hired by Sir Hugh, to serve him as he had done Clarence Grace, clap him into a madhouse, and keep him there unbeknownst the rest of his days.

'I had no thought to do more than give him a rousing good fright; and when I saw what came of it—blowed! if I wouldn't rather than fifty pound, I had kept my tongue in my cheek, and just done what I had hired for, and nothing more.'

So far Mr Grimes, with whom the doctor had then and there struck a bargain; engaging on his own responsibility that, in consideration of the packet of papers, and of a solemn oath of secrecy, the required sum of five thousand pounds should be forthcoming by a given date; Mr Grimes on his part undertaking to devote himself, for such time as his services might be required, to the personal care of Sir Hugh.

Of the papers, indeed, the doctor already was custodian, Grimes having, with singular trustfulness, confided them to his keeping; so that in covenanting to pay the large sum demanded, he was working by no means in the dark.

As regarded the contents of the packet, Purcell's caution had (not unnaturally) been far in excess of his frankness; for, not alone did they furnish him with a clue to the identity of the individual implicated, but, as Grimes had truly stated, brought the guilt plainly home to Sir Hugh; one of the papers being a document of no less weight than a letter, wherein the baronet engaged him-

self to pay Ashlin the sum of one thousand pounds yearly for the safe custody of his brother; which, with others scarce less damaging, together with sundry notes and memoranda in Ashlin's handwriting, placed the story of the fraud in which they were accomplices beyond all doubt.

'Clarence Grace will be on the spot presently,' said the doctor in conclusion, 'furnished with ample proof of his identity, and with powerful friends to back his claims should he choose to advance them, which he does not. I tell you this in order to show you that if we are in your power, you are also to a great degree in ours; and that if you were to push us to extremities, you should not go scot free. But at the same time you know as well as we do, that we could not punish you without exposing ourselves; and that the sole wish of every one concerned in this wretched business is to hush it up, which we are willing to do, even at cost of the great sum I have now promised you. What security have I, that if I pay it Sir Hugh's daughter will be let to live in peace? How can I tell but that it would be better at once to set you at defiance, instead of first risking my money, and then finding that I cannot keep hold of what I have bought?'

'Sir,' replied Mr Grimes with a sulky assumption of dignity, tempered by a wholesome apprehension that the doctor, and not himself, might be the one to contemplate backing from the treaty, 'I thought I had made it plain all along, as how the one thing I scorns is to see a man not sticking

to a bargain when once he has got paid his price ; and I leave it to you, is it likely that what I scorns in another, I'd take to doing at this time of day myself. It is that is the way I have always kept up my character, so that when old Ashlin wanted one that he could trust as you would the priest in his box, the man that I had done hiring with, claps me into the place, without two words said ; which I held it for nigh on sixteen years, trusted and respectable, and would till now, if it hadn't been that things split up. Pay me my price, and your secret is as safe as if you had cut my tongue out to hinder me from talking of it, or had chopped my hands off, to prevent me from writing it with a pen.'

Beyond this, prudence nor scepticism could no further go. And thus things stood on the afternoon to which we have brought down our story, and on which the doctor, accompanied by the *soi disant* Krantz and the two girls—for Nina had decisively refused to let May go alone at such a time—was to convey Sir Hugh the first stage of his journey to London ; there to take counsel with the most eminent ones of his calling, as to the course of treatment to be adopted in his case.

We left him apparently vainly endeavouring to win Maurice back to a sense of duty, the latter, possessed by the vague wayward obstinacy, so apt at times to obtain with the miserable, refusing to speak the compliance, on which already we have shown that he was resolved.

The sound of wheels, audible from afar off

amid the solemn hush that wrapped the dwelling, roused the young man from the fit of gloomy abstraction, into which he had fallen after the doctor had spoken last.

‘Doctor Egan, if you and I should not meet for years, if we should never meet again, will you remember that I am not ungrateful to you; that if I do not thank you as I ought, it is only because I cannot do it yet?’

He had risen, and was standing before him, both hands grasping his shoulders; the doctor, startled by the abruptness of this implied leave-taking, considerably the more discomposed of the two.

‘Not meet for years, Maurice! Why should that be? You talk of gratitude, my boy. If you cannot do what I ask you from a sense of duty, cannot you do it for my sake? Can you not do it out of gratitude to me?’

‘It is not that. I will go back to my mother—I had made up my mind to do it—and I will stay, too, if she wishes it, as long as I can bear to stay. But, as God will judge me, I cannot meet Clarence Grace; and I do not think that you, or any man, can claim the right to humble me to such a point as to demand it.’

‘Pooh, pooh! is that all? Why, that is altogether your own concern. Square accounts any way you please with the men, and I will not seek to meddle with you. I only spoke in behalf of Martha, to whom you owe so much. Go back to her now, and stay with her if you can until my

return; but after that you must, for your own sake, go away and live an active life, at least for awhile. Promise me that you will not quit Ireland without having seen me again, and I am content.'

The promise was given; and then with a hurried 'Good-bye, and God bless you,' he threw open the window and went out, as the sound of footsteps was heard approaching the room.

The sunset glow had departed when he quitted the harbour, where he had sat wrestling long hours with his soul-consuming agony, to return to the house, suddenly remembering that his lengthened absence was calculated to alarm Matt.

In the hall he met the old man, stick in hand, in the act of going in quest of him.

'I am going back to my mother, Matt,' he said, in answer to the old man's questioning look.

'You will never repent of that same. That is what the poor little *colleen* said to me awhile ago, an' she with my two ould hands in hers. "Tell him that I do not ask him to go back to her, because I *know* that he will do it without the askin'," says she, speakin' as fair and quiet, as if she was only givin' me the time of day. "I know that he'll do it without the askin'," says she, "and that he'll be glad of it to the day he dies." She is the greatest little haro I ever set eyes on, an' she lookin' as white and as tender as a snowdrop, all the while.

'I'm thinkin' that I'll follow you over after a bit,' he went on, seeing that Maurice made no

reply, 'and ask for a shake-down for the night. I never closed an eye since I lay under this roof, an' I'm lost for a good night's sleep.'

'It is no home of mine, Matt, else I would say, "Come and welcome."'

'I'll make free to go all the same.'

And so the pair parted. And with no backward glance at the sin-blighted dwelling he might never see again, Maurice quitted the spot; and hastening onward amid the thick-coming shadows, presently found himself on the threshold of his desecrated home.

CHAPTER VI.

DESECRATED though it was, and fated to be haunted for evermore by the ghost of that long-buried guilt, it was home still, as the young man felt, when, silently crossing its threshold, he stood within the old wainscotted room, and, himself unseen, looked again on the altered face of the mother, to whom that guilt held him henceforth bound by a double tie.

He had come back to her, moved to such course by the sense that it would be a coward act to desert her in her misery, rather than by any tender filial impulse to speak words of pity and forgiveness; but at sight of her he forgot everything, save that she was the mother in whose bosom his childhood had found rest and shelter; the one human creature who had skill to assuage the agony, which it was the sorest penalty of her sin that she had been forced to inflict.

‘Mother.’

He was on his knees beside her, his face buried in her lap, sobs which no pride was now at hand to stifle, convulsing his frame; sobs choking the utterance of all save the one appealing word :

‘Mother, Mother!’

As quiet and unfaltering as though that wretched secret had never been dragged to light, as though the name were one to which clung no taint of sorrow, or of sin, Martha bent and kissed him, smoothing the tangled locks from off his forehead, with the same soft tender touch, with which she had calmed many a childish outburst, had laid many an angry spirit of the after-days to its rest.

‘God’s blessing be on you for that same word. I never thought to hear it from your lips again.

‘Matt Donovan told me you were mortal angry with me, and that you had sworn never to come next or nigh me,’ she went on presently, relapsing as was her wont, when the emotional phase was dominant, into the homely little house-mother of old; ‘but *she* said another thing all along. *She* said that it wasn’t in you to turn against me entirely, for only doing what I couldn’t help; and that by-and-by, when the first of the shock had passed, you would come back to me, if it was only to say one kind word before you’d go. She kept my heart up when the weight of the trouble was crushing it. Only for her, it must have broke in two that awful night.’

‘Do not speak of her,’ said poor Maurice hoarsely. ‘I cannot bear it—yet.’

‘I’ll never ask to name her till you speak of her yourself; but you would not be my own darling boy, so loyal and feeling, if you did not soon come to see, that it is your duty to root out the

evil love, and put a brother's heart in your bosom instead. It's not a man's part to hang back and leave a slip of a girl like her to bear the whole weight of her father's sins, when by rights the biggest share should be borne by yourself, you being a man. There, there! don't tremble so. God sees I am sorry now I was so headstrong, but I did it all for the best. I knew that the thought of the disgrace would burn into you, and take the heart and spirit out of you in your youth; and I wanted to save you from that.'

To the throng of bitter feelings that held him silent, was added one of wonder, deep and all-pervading, as the young man listened to this speech.

How calmly this woman could preach to him of duty; could point out the path which he must henceforth tread, claiming the while that she herself was all but blameless; she whose dereliction from that same path, had ruined him utterly in this world—in the reckless anguish of the moment he had almost added—and in the next!

Was this in good truth the hapless creature, whom he had pictured as stricken to the earth in the agony of her sorrow and self-abasement? this the desolate mother, mourning over the desertion of the son who was her only hope?

There was a long heavy pause, broken only by the crackling of the logs within the grate, where, with the hungry human craving for companionship in her loneliness, for the presence of aught that could dispel the chilling shadows, to which the old Tower homestead had become the prey,

Martha had caused a fire to be kindled. Then, in a voice by no means so calmly self-contained, the little woman spoke again :

‘The doctor tells me that Arthur Wylde will be soon back now ; and dear knows, like on that first night long ago, I can’t say whether it is most frightened or pleased I am, at the thought of seeing him again. He was always dead against my keeping the thing a secret from you ; and now when he hears what has happened——’

Maurice raised his head with a sharp cry :

‘My God ! you do not mean to tell me that Arthur Wylde knew this ?’

‘Knew what, *avic* ?’

‘Knew that—that—I was not James Cronin’s son ?’

Martha stared :

‘That’s the quare asking, dear. Of course he knew *that* ; didn’t the letter tell him that much ? Wasn’t that what he had in his mind, when he made you pass your word to him, that you would never look at the Cronins’ money, knowing that you had no more call to it than he had himself.’

With a gesture of infinite repulsion he turned from her, and rose to his feet :

‘It drives me mad to hear you speak so coolly ! I came here expecting to see you crushed down, overwhelmed with——’

‘Shame’ was the word that was well-nigh past his lips, but at sight of the wan, drawn face so wonderingly raised to his, he checked it ; and, no other coming in its place, paused abruptly :—

‘Mother, tell me the whole truth now, at last. Has Arthur Wylde been a blacker enemy to me, than even you have been? He knew that I loved this girl. Did he want to ruin me body and soul, because I was of the same race with the man who had dishonoured him? Was it part of his revenge to let me go on loving her, knowing whose son I am? Was this——’

‘Lord look down upon us, child! the trouble has turned your brain.’

She had quitted her seat and was standing beside him, a gleam, more angry perhaps than pitiful, lighting up her weary eyes.

‘Arthur Wylde and me your enemies! Say what you like against me, but what has he ever been but the best, and truest? What loyaler could he be to you, if you were his own born son? He calls himself a haythen, and a power of hard names, when the old scornful temper gets up in him; but I’d like to see the Christian that would forgive and forget as he has done. It is down on your knees you ought to be, asking pardon for having given him one ill thought.’

But Maurice was in no mood to be brow-beaten; still less was he in a condition to weigh judicially the merits of the man, by whom he conceived that he had been so foully wronged.

‘I did not come here to bandy words about him;’ he said coldly, ‘I did not mean to speak of him at all, but since you have been the one to do it, I insist on learning the full truth. He knew that I was not Cronin’s son, and he was opposed to

your deceiving me. So far you have admitted, and after that it is useless to seek to withhold anything. Why did he lead me on to love this girl, knowing that she could never be my wife ?'

A swift look of alarm crossed Martha's face ; a look plainly expressive of such terror as well might thrill to the heart of the stoutest among us, on realizing that we stood in company with a lunatic, alone, and with no aid at call.

'Maurice, darling, don't look so wild at me. I didn't mean to vex you, dear ; you know I didn't, but—— Sit down here by me, and put your poor head in my lap. Sure it's gone astray you are, with the pain and the grief, and——'

'Hush ? Do you take me for a child still, or for a fool ?'

With vehemence, but little calculated to reassure, he thrust her back into her seat and stood over her :

'If you think that I am mad, or that I mean murder, you are mistaken. I am as sane as you are, and I tell you that I will never cross his path again ; but I will have my question answered now. Why did he seek to ruin me ? Was it through revenge ?'

'He didn't do it, he didn't do it ! O Mother of Mercy ! O Lord ! O Lord !'

Forcing her hands from his, she clasped them over her face, rocking herself to and fro, and moaning, as many a time ere now he had seen her do, when in extremity of distress.

The sight of her in the homely well-remem-

bered attitude, moved him as no more tutored appeal could have done.

He had come back, if not to uphold and comfort her, certainly not to rail against, or threaten; above all not at this crisis, when plainly—the same thought that a moment past he had read in her face, wrote itself as legibly in his—her mind was unhinged, by the suffering that had secretly been preying on it for so long.

Quietly resuming his kneeling posture by her side, he put his arm round her, and kissed her.

‘Do not let us quarrel about him, mother. I come back to you broken-hearted, thinking to get some comfort, and you have only hard words to give me, and all for him. What is he to you, that you should turn to him from me?’

Martha looked up quickly.

‘All the world is nothing to me compared to you! if I haven’t proved that already, I can never do it. I was wrong to cross you, and you not yourself; but I couldn’t stand by and hear you say such things of him, knowing all that he has been to us both.’

‘We will talk no more of him since you will not answer me. Let him be.’

‘I’ll answer you anything you like to ask, only you forget, *avie*, that you’ve heard it all already. What is it you want to know?’

‘I want not to be mystified any longer. Wylde was opposed, you say, to your deceiving me, and yet he joined in the deception. He knew

all along who my father was, and, nevertheless——’

‘I never said he knew that! he never knew that till at the end. He thought to frighten the name out of me, the night he came back first, but I wouldn’t give it to him, for he had shed blood in a like cause already, and I knew that he was craving for more. And then, when he saw that I was not going to let him have his will, he threatened to tell you all he knew; and with that I went down on my two knees to him, and begged him, harder than I ever begged anything for myself from mortal man, that he would spare you; knowing how cruel bad you’d take it, if ever you came at the truth.’

‘And then?’

‘Then he softened a bit, and promised to keep it a secret, but he warned me even then that I was taking the wrong road, for that deceiving could lead to no good end. And once after that, in this very house, when he thought to get it from me, and I turned on him, and gave him language, he said for me to go my own way, but not to blame him if he should make any blunders, owing to my keeping him in the dark. A “blunder,” that was the very word he used; and the doctor said the same to me the other day. A blunder it was, *avie*, and a cruel one; but don’t be hard on me, for I did it for the best.’

A blunder.

Again the same strangely tolerant word, to which again the young man listened with the

same deep wonderment, as when already he had heard it from the doctor's lips.

Truly the world had changed, had adopted some newer and blander code of morals, since even the not yet remote days of his childhood, when such home-blighting sin as this, was wont to be more rigorously dealt with.

But he was here in character of son, and not of judge; and as such it behoved him to hold his peace, and let it pass.

'He came upon the truth at the end, you say. How and when?'

'Not until the morning before he went away. You remember, don't you? You had been at the Chase overnight, and when breakfast was done you stood up, and went to the glass, and began saying how you must be a changeling, by reason of not being a bit like the Cronins. The minute you had said it, I felt myself growing cold all over with the fright, and Arthur saw it too; and with that he gets up, and crosses over, and puts himself between us, so as to keep you from noticing me, and stands looking me straight in the two eyes, and frowning, as much as to bid me rouse up, and not be the one to tell upon myself.

'I was getting the fright well under when you went on to talk of the Graces, and how Percy, God rest him! had said that you were the image of his father. And with that I felt my face give a twitch, and my jaws get as set, and as cold as two stones; and I knew on the minute that it

was all over with me, and that I might all as one have told him the truth at first.

‘I disremember everything else except that Arthur bent over me, and not speaking above a whisper, though I could hear every word, the same as if he shouted, “*Is Hugh Grace the man that ruined my life?*” says he; and with that I gasped out, “Yes.” I thought to hold back the answer, but it was seemingly as if he dragged it out of me; and then I went off in a dead faint, and heard no more. It was the mortal fear that did it, for I made sure there would be murder done before night; and God sees, the same fear has never quit its hold of me since.

‘Now you know it all,’ concluded Martha; ‘and that shows you, why I seemingly took part with him against you. Arthur wasn’t to blame for any of it. He was nothing but the best of friends, from first to last.’

‘*Is Hugh Grace the man that ruined my life?*’

Those words spoken of his own mother, and spoken by Arthur Wylde; by the man to whose dark heart-history he had so recently been a listener! the man from whose own lips he had heard the declaration, that to another, and not to this meek, unblushing little sinner, he owed the wreck of all that life held dear!

Clearly a specimen, this of Martha’s, of that peculiar style of explanatory notes, on which most of us have had the doubtful luck to stumble, which themselves require more explanation, than

does the text that they purport to elucidate.

A sensation of utter, hopeless bewilderment, of pitiful, despairing helplessness, such as we well might picture to ourselves being experienced by one conscious that sanity is slipping from him, that to strive to retain his grasp of it, is as idle as to seek to stay the winds, took possession of the young man's mind, as with head again laid low on her lap, he knelt quiescent; making no effort now to stem the flood of wild, disjointed thoughts, that came sweeping over him in the silence that ensued.

The sound of his mother's voice aroused him.

'Maurice, dear, I think I hear the noise of wheels far off down the back road. Who could be coming this way so late?'

Maurice raised his head and listened; but hearing nothing was lowering it again, when Martha stayed him.

'Look me in the face one minute, dear, while I say a word to you. The seldomer you and me speaks of this after to-night, the better for both of us; and so, before we lay it aside for ever, I want you to make me one promise. I want you, in God's name! *avic*, to put your two hands in mine, and to promise me, that you will try to forgive your poor mother from the bottom of your heart.'

'I have forgiven her already.'

'Ay, but you must do more. There are times, when our troubles press heavy on us, that we are apt to feel twice bitterer than at others; and it is

at them times that I want you to try and not be hard on her. Remember how young she was, and all that she had gone through; and how she was alone in the world with no one to look after her, and without as much as would buy her a meal's meat, she that had been used to the differ all her life. Think of this, dear, and of how pride and a fair face together, have brought many another to——'

But, as once she had done already, Martha fell into the error of straining the maternal prerogative a degree too far, for at this Maurice could contain himself no longer:

'O mother, cease, for pity's sake! You do not know how shocking, how unwomanly it is to have you speak so. Can you not leave it to me, to your own child, to judge you leniently; and not yourself be the one to seek excuses for your sin!'

He rose and was turning from her, when with a quick movement Martha followed, and restrained him.

'*My sin!* That is a quare saying, to be said by you to me.'

The little white drawn face was flushing hotly now—it was no reflection of the fire glow, as he could plainly see, but the swift unmistakeable flush of anger; and the soft eyes were bright and resolute, as though a moment past they had not been dimmed with tears.

'*My sin!*' she repeated steadily. 'If you are not mad out-and-out, tell me what you mean by that.'

Maurice was startled.

'Forgive me,' he said humbly, 'I never meant to wound you. The word was no fit one for me to use, I know, but it slipped from me unawares. Forgive me.'

'There is nothing to forgive if you prove that I deserve it; but look me straight in the two eyes, and tell me what *I* have done, that you should come here, talking to me of *my* sin.'

And even yet no slumbering instinct could arouse itself, to whisper the obvious meaning of her words, as, with a short bitter laugh, that jarred even upon his own dulled ear, he made answer to the question, which she was resolved that he should not elude.

'You ask me am I mad. Perhaps I am; and yet it seems to me that I was sane enough a week ago, when in yonder room I heard you say, that I was the son of—of Sir Hugh Grace.'

'That is true, God help you! I said that.'

'And yet—— Mother, what has changed you so? It is awful to hear you and me speak in such a strain! It is not my place to taunt you with it, but—Oh mother, do you forget that I, your son, must pay the penalty of it while I live?'

'O Lord, O Lord!'

He strove to take her in his arms, but she slid from them to her knees, pity, amazement, awe, sweeping the angry flush from out her face, as the light against which he had sealed his senses, broke in on her perturbed brain at last.

'O Lord! O Lord! you thought that it was

me. You thought that it was me had brought the sorrow upon you; me, that has been striving to shield you from it all your days.'

She looked up at him as he stood rooted to the spot; and, at sight of the face, transformed as once already she had seen it, by its look of speechless horror and surprise, tottered to her feet, and laid both trembling hands on his:

'You thought that it was me,' she repeated. 'O, darlin' alive, don't look at me as if you were turned into a stone, but answer me. Was that the meaning you took from what I said to you? Didn't the doctor, didn't any of them tell you better? Was it myself you thought I was speaking of, when I asked you to pity your poor young mother in her grave?'

Not for dear life's sake could the dry lips force themselves to frame one syllable; but the eyes, desperate and agonized as those of some dumb tortured animal, spoke the answer without need of words.

'You are no child of mine, dear. It was not me he came deluderin', or he'd have got his answer ready enough. He tried his tricks on one, that knew no more of the world's wickedness than a baby; one that I wasn't fit to tie her shoe-strings, for all that misery blinded her for a bit. You are Nina Desmond's child, *avic*, and she died in the same hour that you were born. That is why I bid you not to be hard upon her, seeing that she paid a heavy price for what she had done.'

Mechanically the young man moved past her, and clutching for support to the back of the chair,

sank swiftly down, as though smitten by a heavy hand, beside it on his knees.

And so kneeling in trance-like apathy, his ears stunned as by the noise of a mighty cataract, such light as 'never was on sea or land' flooding upon his dazzled gaze, there seemed to rise before him, as though conjured up by the name of the forgotten dead, those two, whom in mortal semblance he had sworn never to look upon again: Arthur Wylde towering aloft, grimly chieftain-like as when first they had stood face to face, but no longer with a wrathful shadow on his brow; and by his side, with pallid cheek, and sorrow-laden, yearning eyes, Clarence Grace, unchanged in all, save that the dark hair was blanched now to silvery white, from the fateful hour, in which his son's hand had been stretched forth, to rescue him from his living tomb!

And then——

But how seek to palliate the weakness of one, of whom the veracious chronicler is forced to state, that thrice, at crises, wherein a youth cast in the same antique mould, and of the same true metal, with those whom the novelist delights to 'burnish into heroes,' needs would hold himself firm and unfaltering, he had let slip his grasp on sense and feeling; had cast down for a space the burden of the consciousness, that had long been greater than he could bear.

We would fain crave to have it remembered, that our hero had long been fortune's shuttlecock; and that it is the shuttlecock's appointed

doom, to be now tossed giddily high in air, and anon let to fall ignominiously to earth.

Be the palliative, however, scorned, or accepted, truth compels us all the same to admit, that for the third, happily the last time within the limits of this history, our hero sank down insensible; his head pillowed on his father's breast, the father's tears raining thickly on the sad young face, on which grief had already set the deep abiding mark, which, till Time, with all-subduing hand, had come to aid them, not all life's sweetest influences united, would have power altogether to erase.

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On the scene that followed on his awakening, we may not pause to dwell, since the exigencies of our tale compel us to hasten onward without further lingering, where already perhaps we have lingered but too long.

Of the origin of the hallucination, to which for three-and-twenty grief-saddened, anxious years she had been the victim, to which she had in turn victimised others, Martha's explanation, if a lengthened, was yet a simple one enough.

Deserted by her husband within a short time of her becoming a mother, she had remained in the place where he had left her, which happened to be a small town in the North of England, until after the birth of her infant; when, finding herself almost totally destitute, she made her way to Liverpool, intending to cross thence to Ireland, and seek assistance, or at least comfort, from such friends as she might find still subsisting in her native place.

Arriving in Liverpool, the first person she encountered chanced to be an old home acquaintance, from whom she got a version, doubly distressing because a terribly garbled one, of all the occurrences that had taken place at Prior's Pass since her marriage, and of which her husband had purposely kept her ignorant, for reasons best known to himself.

The colonel had been ruined 'out-and-out,' and had killed himself—so much was certain; and Miss Nina had disappeared, no one knew where, though most people, Martha's informant for one, charitably opined that she had 'gone to the bad,' following the example set her by her cousin, as grand a lady, and every bit as proud as herself.

This intelligence had the effect of causing Martha immediately to alter her plans.

Destitute though she was, and burdened moreover with a sickly infant, she at once resolved to remain in England and seek out Nina, with the view if possible to rescue her, should the terrible surmise be proved correct; at worst, to watch over and guard her, from the ultimate consequences of sin.

In pursuance of this resolution she was about to turn her steps towards London (she had profited, if in nothing else, in knowledge of the world, from contact with her worthy husband, and knew that to those who seek, with a view to find, London affords, at the outset at least, the surest mark), when her baby, always an ailing one, fell ill; and, after lingering a few weeks, during which time the mother's heart was

emptied of all care, save for the frail life ebbing hourly before her eyes, died, and was laid to sleep in its pauper grave.

At this stage we had as well let Martha speak for herself:—

‘I was heart-broken when it was taken from me, for, much as I had gone through with Jemmy, I was young still to sorrow, and I couldn’t see that it was the Lord’s hand that was in it, working in everything for my good. But, after a time, I roused myself up with thinking of Miss Nina; and how, if I wanted to be of any service to her, I had best set about it without loss of a minute more.

‘I was a long while casting about in my mind how I had best begin; but at last I bethought me that I would write to Father Dempsey, that was then parish priest at Rath-Cronan, and that had christened me, and afterwards married me to Jemmy, though not without giving me an advice, that I was doing a fool’s act in having anything to say to the same man; and that I would tell him how things had gone with me, and what I had heard about Miss Nina, and would ask him to send me a line in return, seeing that he would be sure to have the whole account correct.

‘It was God put it into my head to do it, for by the very next post comes back an answer, saying that over a fortnight before my letter reaching him, he had got one from Miss Desmond, asking him could he find out anything about Martha Doran, that was her play-companion and after-

wards her maid, before the troubles came, and that was now Mrs Cronin; and that, if he could find me, he was to tell me that she was very ill, and in sore trouble, and to give me the number and the name of the street where she was living, in one of the suburbs of London, and where I was to go and see her without delay.

‘Inside of his letter was bank notes for twenty pounds, which he said I was not to be above taking the loan of, seeing that I could pay him back if I got to be well off, or that my husband took to doing his duty by me again; and that if not, who should I be so willing to be helped by, as by an old friend? And so, only waiting to write a line to say, that though I might never be able to pay him, I would thank him and bless him all the days of my life, I set out for London, hardly drawing breath until I got to it, and into the street where Miss Nina lived.

‘It was getting to be dusk when I got to it, for it was then the month of December, when the days at the best are but short; and though I had reached the town early, yet what with not knowing my way, and finding no one civil enough to step aside to show it to me, I dare say I took many a wrong turning, and was longer than I had need to be on the road.

‘Anyhow it was getting to be dusk when I got to it; and seeing a shabby out-of-the-way place, no more than the one row of dingy old houses, with a bit of dead wall straight in front of them, I was beginning to think I had come wrong after

all, when a door about ten or a dozen houses off from me, was opened, and a gentleman stepped out, and after shutting it behind him, came walking slowly along to where I stood.

‘There was not another soul to be seen, and so, not liking to let slip a chance of getting set right, I was on the point of speaking to ask a direction from him, when I caught a sight of his face; and with that I got an awful turn, the same as if you had passed a knife through me, and I laid hold on the nearest railing, and sank down on the door-step, as cold as a stone, and without power in me to say one word.

‘There is no need to tell you who it was.

‘I had seen the same Sir Hugh Grace, or *Mr* Hugh as he used to be called then, many’s the time at the colonel’s; and knew how Miss Nina, though she never could abide Beresford, had always taken kindly to him, and used often to say what a grand noble-looking man he was, and how no one could come up to him in this thing or in that. And I had noticed, moreover, that the last time I had seen them together, he couldn’t take his eyes off of her, but would follow her with them everywhere, though he was a married man then, and had his wife along with him, a shy, gentle little creature, that seemingly doted on him, though it was plain to be seen that the love was mostly on her side.

‘I remembered all that as I sat there on the cold door-step; and at the same minute there came back to me the story I had heard from Joe

Clancy's wife in Liverpool, and that Father Dempsey had not been able to give the lie to, or else he would have done it; and I made up my mind, God forgive me! that that story was true, and that it was to another of the same stock that had already brought shame and sorrow to us, that my poor desolate darlin' owed her ruin. And with that I rose, and not wanting to ask for any more directions, I walked straight up to the house I had seen him quitting, and knocked.

'I was kept waiting a good bit, so I knocked again, and then the door was opened by a stout woman with a harsh forbiddin' face, and she looking very red and flustered; and almost before that the words were well out of my mouth, "Is it here that Mrs Brown lives?"—that was the name that Miss Nina had said in her letter to Father Dempsey, I was to ask for her by—"Oh, you are the woman the doctor promised to send to her, are you?" said she, speaking very bitter and short.

'I don't know what prompted me to it, but on the spurt of the moment I answered, "Yes," not rightly minding what I said.

' "It's high time that you should come asking," said she, "and me expecting you these three hours." And with that she led the way up-stairs, and into a little black hole of a sitting-room; where lying all in a heap on the floor, with just her head propped up on a chair, was something that I needed no light to show me was my poor girl, that from the first minute I felt I had come too late to save.

‘I know no more now than I did then, why it was that I acted as I did.

‘It was partly, I think, that I felt as if I was turned into a stone, and couldn’t cry a tear, or speak a word if my life depended on it; but more than that, the same feeling that had prompted me to tell a lie at the onset, warned me to take my chance now, and not let on who I was. And so all I did was to stoop over her in the dark, and kiss her poor cold face, while the woman had her back turned to me, and she fumbling about the room in search of a light, and talking away as hard and as bitter as you please.

‘By the time she had found the candle, I had come to myself a bit; and then I asked her, as quietly as I could, to help me to lift her, and to get her in between us to her bed.

‘“Whether she has done wrong or right,” said I, “she is in no state now for another woman to be hard upon her; and since she has seemingly no friend to stand by her in her trouble, it is for you and me to do it, if only for God’s sake, and that we might some day need a helping hand ourselves.”

‘“Speak for yourself,” said she, as sharp and short as before. But for all that she lent the helping hand I had asked for, and between us we carried her into the next room, and laid her on her bed, and after a time managed to bring her to out of her faint; but when I looked in her eyes I saw that her mind was gone, and that she no more knew me, than if I was a black stranger that she had never seen before.

'After a while the woman of the house got more conversable, and made a cup of tea, and over that I made out to grow very sociable, by way of getting her into chat, and finding all she could tell, without letting her suspect that I had an object in trying to pump her.

'What she had to tell wasn't much, when you stripped it of all her hard unchristian talk.

'It was about a month before, that Miss Nina had come and taken her two rooms, and instead of giving reference, had paid her a month's rent in hand; and then, an hour or two later, had driven up to the door with no more luggage than fitted in one small trunk. And saving for twice when she had watched her to the nearest post-office, once shortly after her coming to the place, and again when a fortnight or so had passed, she hadn't been outside the doors from that day.

'She suspected, she said, from the first, that all was not correct; for it was not to be believed that a young person of her appearance, would be left alone in her condition if it wasn't that she had disgraced her friends, and that they had cast her off. And only that very day, seeing plainly how things stood, she had made up her mind to give her warning to leave, her house being always highly respectable, and never having had the like to happen in it before.

'I remember every word,' said Martha, her soft face quivering piteously, as, seated between Wylde and the penitent Maurice, her hands clasping a hand of each, she brokenly told the

tale, the small hours creeping on them unheeded, while the four spell-bound human beings, for Clarence Grace's rugged foster-father had joined himself to the group, listened with bated breath.

'I remember every word she said, and the way she tightened up her lips so scornful, and me not able to say one syllable, with thanking God that had sent me there, and had put it into my head to act a part, so as maybe to be able to circumvent them, that could hardly be meaning to deal fairly by the child, seeing the state to which they had brought the mother.

'That very day, she said, she had made up her mind to give her warning, but in the morning comes a doctor and asks to see Mrs Brown; and, after staying above awhile, comes down and gives directions for her not to be disturbed, and that in the course of the day he'd send a woman to attend upon her, and would call himself again before night. And later on, about an hour before I had knocked, comes a gentleman—a fine commanding-looking man—and asks was it here that Mrs Brown lived; and, being answered "yes," says for him to be shown into the room to her direct.

'She had brought him up, and into the sitting-room where Miss Nina was at the time, and had then stole into the bed-room, meaning, as she didn't seek to deny, to listen and hear what they were saying if she could. But they spoke so low, that she could scarcely catch a word till near the end, when she heard the gentleman say quite

clearly, for he had raised his voice as if he was angry, though he spoke quietly enough :

“ *“ The folly was yours,” she heard him say, “ to trust so lightly ; for your experience of my cousin should have taught you what to expect from our race. I am here,”* said he, *“ to make all the amends in my power, but you know already how little I can do.”* ”

‘ What followed after that she could not make out, but all on a sudden she heard an awful screech that made her heart stand still, and then a heavy fall ; and in another minute the door was flung open, and the gentleman came out, and down-stairs with him, and into the street without a word.

‘ She hurried into the room, and there, all in a heap on the floor, she found Miss Nina in a dead faint. She was in the act of trying to bring her to when I knocked ; and then, only waiting to prop her head against a chair, she had come down and let me in, glad enough of some one to take the trouble off her hands.

‘ But, not to make too long a story of it, that night, before twelve o’clock had struck, her baby was born ; and that was you, Maurice *avie*, that I might well claim for my own, seeing that I was the first that ever had you in my arms, and that your own mother died the same hour you saw the light, without having once come to herself, so much as to cast one look at me, or to pray God’s blessing on her lonesome little child.

‘ I didn’t know then that she had left you to me ; but it would have been all the same if I had, for from the first I had made up my mind what I

would do, which it was the greatest of miracles that I was able to do it; for only that an accident kept him away, the doctor would have come back as he said he would, and would have known me for an impostor, and maybe turned me off on the spot.

‘As it was, there was no one to make or meddle with me, for the woman of the house was too glad to be saved all trouble, to ask to hinder me from following my own devices; and so, with little or no help from her, I closed my darlin’s eyes and did all I could for her, wondering at myself all the while, how I could do it so cool and natural like, without as much as asking to cry one tear.

‘It was not until that was done, that I got the key of her box, to look up some baby things, which I had not had a minute to spare from watching beside her to do till then. The first thing I saw on lifting the lid, was a big letter with my own name on the outside, which I slipped into my pocket unbeknown; and then after emptying out the box, so as to make sure that there was not another scrap of writing in it, I gathered together the neat little pile of baby’s things, and was in the act of putting everything else back, when just in the grey of the winter morning, comes a loud knocking at the door.

‘For a second or two I hadn’t power to draw a breath, with thinking it was the doctor; but instead of him it was Sir Hugh.

‘He came up-stairs with the landlady, and over to the bed-side, and stands looking down at

my poor Nina, very grave and stern, but without saying a word.

'Then he crossed over to me, to where I was stooping over the child, and stands a minute looking down quite silent at it.

' "When was it born?" he said at last.

' "About a quarter or twenty minutes before twelve, sir," said I, not raising my head; and then thinking he might suspect me if I didn't add something more, "and as fine a boy as ever I saw, Heaven bless him," said I.

' "Ha! A boy, is it? You are the woman sent here by Doctor Lane?"

' "Yes, sir."

'I had to lift my eyes to his as I said that; and maybe I was not ready to drop with the terror, when I saw him looking at me, as if he would read me through and through.

'I had no great trouble in altering my voice, for it sounded like somebody else's all along, but I was in mortal dread that he might remember my face; for though he had seen me but seldom, and only for a minute or so at a time, still he had an eye like an eagle's, and for all I had kept on my old poke of a bonnet, with a thick cap border underneath, and had made myself look as much like one of them hospital nurses as I could, I wasn't sure but that he might detect me through it all.

'And now you see the reason,' said Martha, parenthetically, 'why from that day to this, I have always shunned meeting sir Hugh Grace. You,

Maurice, and Arthur, and poor Miss May set it down to hate and bitterness on the account of his cousin. But, though I don't deny but what both hate and bitterness was mixed up with it, still the deep reason of all was, that that day him and me had stood face to face; and that within an hour afterwards I had stolen away the child that I never ceased to believe was his, until this night, when God sent the real father to claim it, and to lift the load of sorrow that has weighed on me for years.

'But I have not got quite to the end of what I had to tell.

"You are the woman was sent here by Doctor Lane?" says he.

"I am," said I, "and I wonder the doctor didn't come again before night, as he said he would. Not that he could have done anything for the poor lady, for I saw that it was all over with her from the first look."

"Doctor Lane would have been here, but for an accident," said he. "He was thrown from his horse shortly after quitting this yesterday, and was severely injured. I was not aware of the circumstance until an hour ago, else I should have sent another doctor in his place, though I dare say no one could have been of any use. It was fortunate for poor Mrs Brown, that he had had time to communicate with you."

'He went over again to the bed-side, and said something to the landlady, and then came back to me.

“Can you stay here a few days, and take charge of the infant until I have time to procure a nurse?” said he; and on my answering “Yes,” he puts with his purse, and hands me a note, and bids me not fear but I would be well paid for my trouble; and to take every care of the child until he came back.

‘He wasn’t well gone, till I told the woman of the house that if she liked to lie down and get an hour’s rest after her night, I’d have an eye to the place for her, and that by-and-by maybe she would mind the child, while I’d get a doze in my turn; and so at my bidding she went into the sitting-room, and threw herself on the sofa, and was soon fast asleep.

‘And then I took you, *aric*, in my arms, and went and knelt down by your dead mother’s side, and said a prayer; and when that was done, I rose up and kissed her, not daring even then to shed one tear, and laid your little bit of a face against her cold lips, and stole down-stairs like a thief, and out into the cruel world with the pair of us; I not caring what hardships I was bringing you to share with me, so long as I could keep my darlin’ girl’s child from ever knowing the sin and sorrow of his birth.

‘What Sir Hugh thought when he found us gone, or what he did to trace us, I had no way of learning from that day.

‘The first thing I did on getting clear of the house, was to make my way to one of the poorest

and most crowded places in the town, and take a lodging.

‘I had been in London once before with Jemmy, and knew how to find my way through some parts of it middling well, and how to shun where my own country people were in the habit of gathering, for I didn’t want to run the chance of meeting any one that might be asking me questions. . . Then, with a part of Father Dempsey’s money, I bought a change of clothes for myself and you, and went home and burned them that I had on when I was talking to Sir Hugh, and all your things into the bargain; and that being all I could do to disguise either of us, I took you off to the first priest I could find, and had you christened, and gave the bank-note that Sir Hugh had given me, to the priest to give away in charity; and then left everything else in the hands of God, knowing that I had done my best.

‘I called you Maurice after my own child, as it was his place you were to fill all your life; and I gave you the name of Evelyn after the one only man that I thought had been true to your mother, and that, judging by her letter, her heart had seemingly turned to in the end.

‘If I could have had any doubts about Sir Hugh being your father, which I had not, that same letter would have put them out of my mind for ever. It named no names, and it was so wild and sorrowful that you could not take over-much meaning out of it; but every word of it seemed to

point to him, and to no one else, as you will see when you have read it for yourself.

‘Inside of mine was one to Arthur, which I posted to the address of the London agents that was to forward all his letters to him while he was away. It was seventeen long years before I next saw that letter, any more than the face of the man it was directed to; but when I had seen it, there was nothing in it to shake the belief that I had held to from the first. You can read them both now, by way of a finish to my story, and say if, in my place, you would have had room in your mind for any doubt.’

That in her place they must have believed as she had done, was the verdict of son and husband, when with eyes that scarce might see for the mist that veiled them, they had read each sorrowful record to a close.

The letter to Martha, which was in good truth what she had described it, wild and sorrowful, bore date, as did the other, of the night preceding the writer’s death; and given word for word, as it needs must be, in order to account for its influence in confirming Martha in her error, ran as follows:

‘I have given up all hope of seeing you, Mattie, for I have watched and waited, and have prayed to God night and day, to send you to me, and my prayer has not been heard; and I feel now that the end is near, and that I must die without one sight of your dear loving face, to comfort me in my awful pain.

‘I would not mind so much for myself, for I am long past hope in this world; and even you, my darling, could do little to comfort me, since the sight of you would but add to my bitter self-reproach. But when I think of my poor little child, and that if it survives me it will be friendless, at the mercy of the man who has brought its mother to ruin, then—then, Martha, I am maddened with shame and misery; then I fly in the face of God, and accuse Him of injustice, because the punishment to which he has doomed me is too heavy, far too heavy even for such sin as mine.

‘I must not think of myself, for when I do my mind wanders, and I should try to be calm now for the sake of my child. I write this because to-night the feeling is strong within me, that even yet you will come; not in time for me to hear you speak one pitying word, but in time to comply with my dying prayer, that if my child lives, you will take it for your own, and be a mother to it for my sake.

‘I will not write down the name of the man who has betrayed me, because this paper must be entrusted to a prying stranger, and may perhaps never reach your hand. I *could* not write it down, Martha—I could not speak it if you were now beside me, because it is the same name with his who first cast dishonour on us, and drove my poor wronged Arthur from his home, a murderer; and I could not bear to look in your eyes, and tell you the shameful tale, of how I crushed a noble

heart for love of one whom, for his name alone, I was bound to hate.

‘If you come, as I feel you will, it may be that you will meet him; for though he has been deaf to my appeal that he would let me see him once more before I die, yet when he hears that I am gone, remorse will seize him, and he will come, willing perhaps to make reparation, by charging himself with the care of his child. But this is what he must not do, Martha; this is what with my dying breath I implore you to hinder. Therefore, if you do meet him, say to him that my child is yours, for that I have given it to you. Say no word to upbraid him; but say that I bade you tell him, if he would not have my curse follow him for ever, not to question, nor dispute my will.

‘I need not charge you to keep his name a secret from Arthur. He will seek to wring it from you, Martha, and he had always a fearful power of bending others to his will; but, for God’s love! do not yield to him in this, or you will be a murderer! I do not wish to be avenged. There would be no justice in revenge, for I was most to blame, and—— Ah, for his own sake, never let him know it, Martha! I have stung him deeply enough already. Let me die, feeling that at the least I have been able to spare him that.

‘Within this letter, you will find one that I have written to him, entreating him to forgive me, and to be a father to my poor, nameless child. I know that in doing this I inflict torture on him,

but I cannot help it. I cannot die without one word to tell of my remorse for my ingratitude, and perfidy; without giving him the poor reward of knowing, that in the end I had come to learn the pricelessness of the love I had cast from me. Above all, Mattie, I cannot leave you to bear the whole weight of the burden, without asking him to share it with you; though Heaven sees that, in humbling myself to do this, I have suffered enough to expiate even the wrong I had done to him.

‘I am weary now, and my head wanders, and I have no strength to write more. On my letter to him, I have put the name of “Arthur” only, for I did not wish that strangers should have the means of identifying him with my disgrace.

‘I do not know if this letter will ever reach you. I had thought of sending it to Father Dempsey, and begging him to trace you out and give it to you; but I had written to him already and he has failed to find you, else you would have come; and now the dread of strangers learning my story, holds me back, and I do not know what to do. I will lay it aside for to-night, and to-morrow, if I am strong enough, I will try to think, and to decide what steps I ought to take.

‘Should it ever reach your hand, Mattie, you will know that I died loving and trusting you; you will be tender with my unhappy little child, and you will be a mother to it, for sake of your sister Nina, who prays for God’s blessing on you with her dying breath.’

* * * * *

So much for the dubious oracle which, coupled with the appearance of Sir Hugh Grace as chief actor on the scene, Martha had naturally, but so grievously, misinterpreted; while for the companion, letter, by the light of which, in later years, Wylde had sought to read the story of the past, not the most skilled expert in the art of sifting evidence, could have extracted from it one iota, to shake the piteous theory which the little woman had built up.

The letter to Wylde, bearing trace as it did in every line of the overwrought feelings that had dictated it, was simply one long passionate appeal to him, to befriend her fatherless orphan, and to pardon the falsehood of which she had been guilty towards him, in having cast him off on the plea that he was a murderer, when the real motive for her breach of faith, was the love she secretly bore to another man, and which she had long striven vainly to repress.

‘I called you a murderer, though in my heart I knew that in your place I would have done as you did. I lied to you because I wanted to be free, and because I was a coward and dared not tell the truth. And now for punishment of my sin, I am dying, maddened and broken-hearted, the victim of one as false to me, as I was then false to you.’

All this repeated over and over, through the length of four pathetic pages, ending as it had begun with an earnest prayer that for sake of the kindred bond that bound them, he would be-

friend her child; but not one word that could point to the identity of that child's unworthy father, that could help to dispel the mist of error, in which Martha had been so hopelessly involved.

It remained for the husband, heart-wrung at this piteous revelation, sickening well nigh to death in having thus re-acted for him the closing scene of the mournful drama, in which unknowingly he had played so chief a part; it remained for him to throw light on more than one dark passage, the meaning of which his enemies had, with fell malevolence, made plain to him.

The history of poor Nina's sad last days, which Clarence Grace told quietly over, in the passionless level tones of one, who had outlived not hope alone, but hope's dread extreme, despair, was, when stripped of the mocking verbiage in which Cronin, his informant, had first clothed it, briefly this:

On quitting his wife he had told her that his absence was likely to be but brief, but had promised that whether long or short, she should have a letter regularly each day; though, to avoid all risk of premature discovery, it was reluctantly agreed between them, that he was to look for none in reply.

Up to the day when he was entrapped, Clarence had zealously fulfilled his promise, but from that hour, needless to say, no word had reached Nina; and at last, alarmed past all control of prudence, the poor girl wrote, addressing her letter to the little mountain inn, whence her husband had last written to her.

In due course came an answer penned by Sir Hugh. Its purport was that Clarence was ill, and had confided the state of his affairs to his brother, asking for counsel and assistance, both of which Sir Hugh expressed his utmost willingness to give. She was on no account to dream of coming to her husband, whose illness, though too serious to permit him to write to her, was nowise dangerous; but was to wait patiently for a few days, when Sir Hugh would bring her news in person, and make arrangements for placing their affairs in proper posture without further delay.

The allotted time of waiting had barely elapsed, when Sir Hugh presented himself to his brother's wife, (he had Clarence now a secure prisoner at Deverell under charge of Cronin, so could afford to absent himself,) and then and there told her, with much feigned grief and indignation, that her marriage with his brother was a mockery, a cruel wrong, which he had vainly urged the unworthy young man to repair; that finding Clarence deaf to his arguments, and about to re-purchase his mother's favour, by yielding to her desire that he should contract a marriage with the wife she had originally destined for him, he (Sir Hugh) had come in person, to break the tidings to the daughter of his old friend Lionel Desmond, and to proffer such sympathy and aid as, under the circumstances, it was but fitting that he should be the one to afford.

Uttered by any other lips, Nina had unhesitatingly rejected this monstrous fable. Told over

with well-dissembled feeling, by the man whom from childhood upward she had been accustomed not alone to regard with confidence as her father's friend, but to look up to and admire, as the type of all that a high-bred, honourable gentleman should be, what wonder that her faith in poor Clarence faltered? that, at sight of the letter purporting to be written by him, (in reality a clever forgery of James Cronin, who, in the intervals of his other studies, had taken pains to perfect himself in more than one art which honest men are wont to view askance,) the conviction of his utter baseness should take possession of her, leaving her doubly helpless, because unsuspecting, at the mercy of her unscrupulous foe?

Recovering from the first awful shock produced by this intelligence, it would seem as though the unhappy girl had resolved to cut herself off from all communication with her husband's family; for, on the following day, she secretly quitted her home, before Sir Hugh had had time to obtain a second interview, wherein to make such arrangements, as would insure her for the present remaining quiet.

Some weeks passed, during which, absorbed in still more pressing cares, he had no leisure to seek to trace her; when, just as he was on the eve of going to London for the purpose, came a letter to him enclosing one to Clarence, in which, finding her end drawing near, Nina piteously besought him to come to her, to do her the poor justice of marrying her even now on her death-bed, and so to

save her child from the stigma that must else attach to it, of illegitimate birth.

On reading this appeal Sir Hugh hesitated, doubtful whether to strike the final blow that at this crisis must speedily crush out life, or to rest quiescent, and let death come more slowly, as the result of the shock already sustained. But while he paused, came an incentive to instant action in the shape of a second letter, in which Nina, driven desperate at last by her sorrows, threatened to travel over to Ireland, dying as she was, and to throw herself for justice on the mother, who was urging him on to such dire sin.

‘You have not told her my story, or she could not do it. No woman, no mother, dare load herself with such a heavy crime; and now that you have scorned my dying prayer, I will go to her and ask pity, not for myself, for I am beyond it, but for my child. I will not die and leave it nameless and disgraced, when by humbling myself I may obtain justice; and, with God’s help, I will do it if I have the strength.’

On hearing this note of alarm, Sir Hugh’s period of indecision ceased.

How poor Nina’s presence on Irish ground, could in any way interfere with his plans, her husband even now, in seeking to elucidate this last dark passage, was at a loss to tell. But, as related to him with jocose minuteness by James Cronin, the story ran, that on receipt of that letter Sir Hugh hastened across to England, sought out the nearest doctor, and despatched him to visit.

Nina; and on hearing his report again presented himself to her, and, ruthlessly regardless of her condition, told her (what from some faint lingerings of humanity he had at their first interview suppressed) that Clarence was dead; producing a newspaper containing the account of the fire, in confirmation of his lying tale.

‘Cronin told me nothing of the birth, much less of the disappearance of my child,’ wound up Clarence Grace in conclusion. ‘He said only that the shock had killed my wife; and what then could I think, but that her child had perished with her, that both had happily escaped the snare set for me? Had I known six years ago what I know now, I was man enough even then to have acted differently. But until the hour when Arthur Wylde sought me out, and challenged me to tell him my name and history, I knew nothing of the blessing that God had spared me; of the great miracle of mercy that in the end wrought my freedom, through the bravery of my own dear son.’

And at length the disjointed facts that, ‘living dispersedly’ in the breasts of many, had been rife with the elements of all that was mischievous, had been brought together, and linked each to each, been made to form one all-embracing comprehensive whole, fraught indeed with much of life-enduring bitterness, but rich the while with seeds of hope and promise, of which that bitterness would yet come to be but the inevitable alloy, which must needs be mingled with all things of earth.

On the silence that followed Clarence Grace's words, Wylde's was the voice first to break.

'Did I promise too much, Maurice, when I told you to have patience for a little longer, and that all would be made clear?'

Maurice coloured.

'For Heaven's sake, do not bring back the remembrance of that wretched night. I will blush for it as long as I live.'

'You have nothing to blush for, but everything to make you proud, and very happy. You see now how I was tongue-tied, and mystified also. I was tongue-tied by my promise to Martha, for I had bound myself on oath never to betray her secret. Then on the night of the very day when I had wrung from her an admission that you were Sir Hugh Grace's son, and while I was still alternately imprecating all sorts of evil things on her, for acting just as any other frightened little woman must have acted in her place, and battling my best with the devil that bade me go direct and kill *him*, you come to me and tell me a story of the locket, and how Woodward had claimed the portrait for the likeness of his *wife*. I had from the first moment of seeing him set Woodward down as your father, from—well, partly indeed from instinct; but far more from the strong likeness between you both in illness, which, strong as it was, seems yet to have escaped all eyes but mine, unconsciously, I suppose, on the alert to discover the man I was in search of, in every stranger that crossed my path.

'You cannot wonder that, bewildered by such conflicting testimony, I should shun communication with either you or Martha, until I had first sought out Woodward, and demanded a solution of the mystery from him. To give you even a hint, would be to virtually break my promise, and at the same time excite hopes that I might fail to realize; while to trust myself in Mrs Martha's company with a secret lurking about me, was to ensure its being conjured from me on the spot. The best, in fact the only thing I could do, was to write my version of the whole occurrence, and lock it up with my will in my desk, for you to give her, should I not speedily turn up; and that you remember I did, and then hurried off, little dreaming of the desperate climax, which my flight was to help to bring about. What have you to say?'

'I have to say, that everything you did was like yourself, noble and forgiving and good. But there is one thing still that puzzles me intensely. You knew that Woodward—that my father's greatest sorrow was the loss of his wife; and my story of the locket proved to you that that wife was Nina Desmond, and yet——'

Wylde interrupted him.

'And yet I was not convinced. I wonder what punishment can we devise for this blundering little woman here, for she is accountable for that along with all the rest. Listen, and I can make that point also plain to you in a few words, as I have already done to your father.'

He laid his hand on Clarence Grace's shoulder,

no touch of lightness in tone or manner, as he went gravely on :

‘I told you already, Maurice, that this poor fellow’s grief for the loss of his wife, was not the point of his story that impressed me the most forcibly, simply because I never heard that story from his own lips, until I heard it on American ground. Well, I give you full leave to doubt me if you will, for I could expect no sane man to credit the assertion ; but yet on the night that Doctor Egan took me into his confidence, and asked me to give advice and help, I felt—Heaven only knows why or wherefore—that the man whom he would bind me by oath to save, was the same I had already sworn to kill, if I should ever meet him. And but that I was overawed in spite of myself, by the strangeness of the fate that brought father and son together, and also because the doctor is one to whom no honest man could refuse a helping hand, I fear I should have yielded to the impulse, that prompted me to draw out of the business altogether, and have left him to do the work without aid from me.

‘Going home to the cottage that night with my mind full of the subject ; unable to rid myself of the conviction, which would cling to me in spite of common sense, and angry that old feelings and memories should have such power over me, as thus to unhinge my mind, I fell to chatting on the old theme with Martha, hoping that she might let drop some word, that would help me to a guess at even the outer appearance of my foe.

‘Simple as she looks, however, Mattie was always on her guard against me, and so let slip nothing on which I could lay hold of until at the end; when, on my craftily expressing my regret for the rashness and violence, that had caused Nina so to dread me, that when wronged she preferred to suffer, rather than appeal to me to see her righted, Martha answered:

“Don’t blame yourself for that. You could have done nothing, short of killing him as you did Beresford; for he had put it out of his own power to right her before——”’

‘She broke off there with a look of reproach, the remembrance of which acted as an effectual check on all further attempts to surprise her secrets. But she had said enough to help me to the false conclusion, which your story in the graveyard barely sufficed to shake.

‘Remember that I was ignorant of everything, save what few bare facts I had gathered from the rather incoherent epistle, which Martha had written to me when enclosing Nina’s.

‘The sum of all that Martha’s letter told me was, that in the man for whom she had rejected me, Nina had found a betrayer; that Martha had been present at her death-bed, and had *stolen* away her child, which she meant to rear up as her own; so that should the father cross its path in after life, he could never identify, or reclaim it.

‘Whether my poor girl had knowingly accepted dishonour, or whether it had been imposed upon her, I knew not, for Martha, fearing, I sup-

pose, that one admission would draw on another, refused ever afterwards to tell me anything; and Nina's letter, as you see yourself, left me free to surmise what I chose.

'It never occurred to me, as how could it, that Martha was in error, so I accepted the little she told me as so much Gospel truth; and when she let slip the admission that the betrayer had "put it out of his power to right her," to what conclusion could I arrive, save that he was already a married man when Nina had met him—the words in Nina's letter, to the effect that she had long striven to repress her love, might be taken to point to that; or else that, after deserting her, he had married another woman, which came to the same thing?

'It was while brooding over all this, and realizing that the process was nowise conducive to the growth of Christian charity in my soul, that I first saw our friend Clarence here, and found confirmation of my fixed idea that he was your father, not alone in his resemblance to you, but far more in the violent agitation which he displayed later on, in his interview with me.

'You can hardly blame me, that under the circumstances I was a little less than cordial; though before long I found myself forgetting my antipathy, and enlisting heart and soul, as the doctor had predicted I should do, in the service of the one man I had vowed to hunt down to death.

'From that hour, Clarence Grace, to the day when we stood face to face in America, you have

vexed my soul unceasingly. I felt that I ought to hate, yet I knew that night and day I was planning how to serve you. I have told myself over and over again, that what you had suffered was a bare set-off against your villainy, yet, could I have fixed my gripe upon your enemy, it would have gone hard with either him or me, but that I would have seen you righted.

‘I can only say further, that from my heart I forgive the woman who broke faith with me, since she did it for no worse a man than you.’

CHAPTER VII.

‘**I**N equal scale weighing delight and dole,’ had fortune apportioned her gifts to our hero, of the web of whose life, as interwoven with that of so many others of our personages, we have completed the unravelment at last.

She had given him a father whose claim he could with pride acknowledge, that father the man who, from the first hour of their meeting, had so singularly enthralled him. By that same act had she parted him, as effectually as though Martha’s story had indeed been the true one, from the woman, whose love was the one pearl of price he had ever coveted ; for the loss of whom, not all the countless blessings strewn around him, could ever compensate.

‘I judge of her by myself,’ he said, as Wylde stood by his bed-side—the re-action consequent on the fierce over-strain to which he had been subjected, had at last set in ; and now, the flush of last night’s emotions passed away, he lay back wan and shattered, the wreck of even the troubled self from whom Wylde had parted, on the summer morning when he had begun his quest. ‘I judge

of her by myself, and that means that I give up all hope. So long as I believed myself to be Sir Hugh's son, I was resolved never to face you nor Clarence Grace again, and I would have kept it at any cost, and it will be the same with May now. She could stoop to take pity on me, while I was Maurice Cronin. When she knows whose son I am, she will shrink from me, because forgiveness must come from us. I am as certain that she will never marry me, as if I knew that she was already in her grave.'

Wylde listened in mute disappointment; the tones of the young man's voice, level and passionless as those in which the father had told over his piteous tale, striking chilly to the heart, which a while past had been expanding with such a comfortable glow of hope.

'Do you know, Maurice, that you are making my poor little girl out a monster of pride and ingratitude; and not even on your showing, can I believe her to be that.'

'Go to her, and tell her the whole story. It is much to know that the curse is lifted from us, and that at worst there is neither sin nor—— God! I wonder how I lived through that.'

'I will start this very day, and it shall not be my fault if I do not prove you a false prophet. But just listen to one word about your father. A man who has held insanity at bay for four-and-twenty years, as he has done, can hardly have strength left now to bear up against fresh troubles. If anything happens to you it will kill him, so for

his sake, you must rouse yourself, and be a man.'

'I will do my best,' said Maurice wearily; and then lay back with closed eyes, rebelling in very bitterness of heart, against the decree that ever thus imposed on him the duty of upholding others, himself the while as sorely stricken as any of those to whom he was called to render help.

True to his promise, Wylde quitted the Tower that same afternoon, not, it must be admitted, without a furtive thought, that it was hard lines for him to have to resume his wanderings, without even one day of the restful companionship, of which absence had taught him the full price; and journeying onward in hot haste, had soon reached London, and poured forth to the astonished ears of Nina and the doctor, the wondrous intelligence of all that had transpired since they had last met.

'Break the news to May, doctor, and tell her that I am come to bring her back to the Tower. She need not remain beyond a single day unless she chooses, but come she must, for without her I dare not venture to face Maurice. Tell her that I never beheld such a pitiable wreck in all my life, and that I will not answer for the consequences, if she refuses to let him see her now.'

He strove to speak lightly, but there was a world of suppressed anxiety in his voice, as, even amid the tumult of new hopes and feelings, the doctor was quick to note.

'You take too dark a view of things. The poor fellow has suffered so cruelly that I would not promise that he will be ever altogether him-

self; but then happiness is a great restorer, and I see nothing to hinder their being at least fairly happy, when all this has passed away. My fears are more for May, but even she will retrieve, I hope, with time.'

That Wylde's less sanguine temperament precluded his taking even this shadowed view of the case, was evident to Nina, as she watched his face; and unaccustomed, fervid though she was, to proffer sympathy, to one in whose heart she had ever felt that she held no place, she was about silently to follow the doctor from the room, when Wylde stayed her.

'Why do you want to run away from me, cousin Nina? Have you no word of welcome for me, after all the good news I brought you to-day?'

His conscience smote him, not for the first time in connection with her, as he noted the embarrassed air with which she came up to him, and took his outstretched hand.

He had long been conscious of his shortcomings towards the orphan girl so strangely entrusted to him, long been desirous to make amends; but though the time was in the past, when the sight of her beautiful face had called up painful feelings, the constraint and coldness sprung from his first irrepressible repugnance to her presence, had grown and strengthened, till at last, they had come to form one of those barriers which, save under considerable moral pressure, so few can summon courage to overleap.

Precisely the required amount of such pressure

had absence put upon Arthur Wylde, for absence had caused him to think constantly and very longingly of his home, in which the child of his dead kinsman formed an element not to be ignored; and even on his hurried journey he had resolved not to leave her until the ice should have been broken between them; not to let slip the opportunity furnished by the story he had come to tell, without saying something to prove to her, that a daughter's place was vacant for her in his heart, if she could stoop the pride that his coldness must have wounded, and not scorn to accept the tardy gift.

He had planned to do this, yet now that the moment was come he found it was no easy task to do it; all the less easy that the girl never helped him even by a look.

'Have you no word of welcome for me?' he repeated.

'I did not think that words of welcome from me would please you, else I would have said them. I am glad to see you, very, very glad, because of the happiness it will be to *ma mère*, and to all.'

Had she intended, as women are accused of doing, to take 'revenge too deep' for the wrong inflicted, she could have said nothing calculated to sting more sharply; and involuntarily Wylde's voice took a tone of bitterness as he replied:

'Now that you know the whole story, Nina, you should not be so hard with me. Is it too late, child, to seek to make amends?'

Too late, indeed, it seemed, judging by the

sudden prideful hardening of the beautiful face, that awhile past had been all aglow with womanly sympathy ; by the cold resentful gleam that chased all softness from the grand dark eyes.

In good truth, the girl's pride could ill brook that his should be the hand to probe the wound, he had himself inflicted, and which she had hidden with jealous care from every gaze.

'There need be no amends. You have been good, too good, to the orphan who was thrust upon you against your will. I make no complaint.'

'By Jove, no ! but I had rather listen to a storm of reproaches, than see such a look as you have this moment in your face.'

With sudden passionateness Nina strove to snatch away her hand, but he held it fast.

'My face has ever been a trouble to you,' she cried hotly. 'You have been cruel and ungenerous to me because of a thing——'

She broke off a moment, quivering with excitement, then went rapidly on :—

'I had meant to act, and not to speak ; but now that you are the one to do it, you make me free to say what I have wished to say for long. I have seen your face darken when you looked at me, and I have burned with desire to go away, where you should never see me more ; but *ma mère* was all tenderness, and I dared not grieve her, and so I held myself in peace, and stayed. But now that she can have May for her daughter, she will not so much need me ; and so I can do what I had resolved to do, make myself a home, among strangers,

where if no one loves me, at least I shall not have to read in any one's eyes that I am abhorred.'

Time had been, when this bold uprising in rebellion, this grave impeachment of his cherished character for manliness, and generous dealing—an impeachment all the more galling, that on the instant he felt that its stern truthfulness could not be gainsaid—time had been, when all this might have roused up much that was non-angelic in the listener's nature. But recent events had shaken to the foundations of all that remained of the once towering pride, which Martha's silent influence long had tended to subdue; and so it chanced that, looking up defiant though trembling, Nina read in his eyes no trace of the storm of anger for which she had nerved herself, but instead a look of very genuine fatherly love and regret, such as she never before had read there, never deemed it possible could beam from them into hers.

'My poor little girl!'

Only a few commonplace words, but the tone in which they were spoken so infinitely tender and pitiful, so full of pain and self-reproach and wounded feeling, that in the instant of hearing them Nina succumbed; yielded up her post of vantage as quietly as if she were the meekest of women, instead of one of the lofty imperial type, who seem born to command obedience, not to obey.

'I would give the lie to any man that would call me a coward, and yet I have been a coward, and a savage too, in my treatment of you.'

'No, no.'

‘Ay, but I have though! I should have closed my doors as well as my heart against you, or else opened both from the first. My heart has been open to you this many a day, Nina, only you were too regal a young lady to stoop and enter, and I hardly knew how to ask you. Is it too late to do it now?’

May’s reply would have been to nestle closer to him, as he passed his arm round her. There was less of the dove than of the falcon in Nina’s composition, but yet as she looked up in answer to the question, her eyes were brimming over with tears.

‘Forgive me! I feel now that I was ungrateful, and unjust.’

‘It is you who have everything to forgive; but now that you know all, you will not be hard upon me. You understand now how, believing, as I did, that she had betrayed me in order to give herself to dishonour, the sight of all that reminded me of her, must have been bitter to me at times. It is a poor apology to set it down to the account of your face; but if you are true to your sex, you will accept it, when I say that it is the face of the fairest woman I ever saw.’

There was a pause, which Nina had no words to fill up.

‘And so my black looks had nearly frightened you away from me? If you could guess how you have shamed and humbled me, you would not have said that; and yet it was best perhaps that I should hear it, for it shows me in my true

colours to myself. But you will unsay it now, Nina, and you will come back by-and-by, and be my daughter? For Martha's sake, if not for mine, you will do this?'

'I have insulted you. I cannot go.'

'That is what Maurice said on a similar occasion, yet he and I are none the worse friends. Plead some better reason, else I will exert the authority your father gave me. Say, for instance, that at the bottom of all this is dislike of me; one grain of *personal* dislike, Nina, and I will press you no more.'

But this was an appeal to which Nina, ever tenderly regardful of the friable nature of the commodity that men call vanity, could not be deaf.

'You are not a person to be disliked,' she said softly; 'you are one, perhaps, to be hated, or else liked very, very much.'

'Then I am to conclude that *you* hate me?'

Nina felt that she was conquered, but yet she was not one to give in without a protest.

'Men of your stamp would have women to be slaves,' she said, still struggling to be resentful through her tears.

'Would we? Men of my stamp are made to smart pretty frequently then, by the women we select to fill the office. But I think you wrong us—wrong me at least. The two women I have always managed to get along with best, are Martha and May, and there is not much of the stuff of which slaves are made in them.'

Not much indeed, so far as the latter was con-

cerned; for before either of the speedily reconciled ones had thought well to break the lengthened silence that ensued, the doctor was again in the room, and one look at his face told Wylde that the mission on which he had left his Tower home was fruitless; that the lover's estimate of his mistress was the true one, after all.

'She will not come with me?' he questioned eagerly, before the doctor could open his lips to speak.

'Indeed she will not. I was a fool to think it.'

'Let me see her. It cannot be that she will be proof against what I have got to say.'

'You can see her by-and-by, but just yet she had best have no company but Nina. You will talk in vain, however, for I think I have exhausted every possible argument, and yet I have got but the one answer for my pains: "To see either of them will kill me." What could any man say after that?'

'What indeed?' as Wylde realized, when later on that wretched afternoon he sat, with the poor little stricken creature nestling quiet and tearless within his sheltering arm, and in return for all that passionate love and pity could inspire of eloquent pleading, got back the self-same words in reply.

'To see either of them again will kill me, and I want to live long enough to be with my father to the end. I have hardly any strength remaining, and if you make me waste it in argument now, I will have none for him, when he may need me most.'

In good truth the knowledge that he was Clarence Grace's son, had produced precisely the effect that Maurice had anticipated for it; had excited in the unhappy girl's sorrow-weakened mind, a feeling of blind, unreasoning horror and aversion towards him, of bitter, intolerable loathing of herself, such as instinct, it may be, had withheld her from experiencing, even while crushed beneath the conviction, that the same parent had given being to them both.

She had thought that fate had done its worst as she knelt by Percy's death-bed, and listened to the words in which he gave her to his friend. But even then there was solace, though of the bitterest, in the consciousness that they were victims to the same calamity; solace, too, though not even to herself might she admit it, in the thought, that he at least dared not hold her in abhorrence as the child of the murderer, while the curse of the same guilty parentage clung to them alike.

Even then such barren comfort still was spared her — But now? Maurice, the son of Clarence Grace, of the man on whom her father had heaped such foul and unnatural wrong; whom her own weak hand had helped to guide to safety, that in this awful hour he might come back, to triumph in the downfall of his foe!

For her agony of self-abasement there was no healing power in the remembrance, that this same Clarence Grace, in whom she imaged forth an avenger, was he who years ago had taken her in

his arms, and blessed her, knowing well whose child she was; whose whispered words at parting, had spoken earnest of the spirit, in which he purposed to take vengeance for his wrongs.

‘You are too young yet, my child, to know how hard men find it to forgive their enemies; but the time may come when you will realize it; and then call to mind, May, that I promise for *your* sake, to try to forgive *my* enemies, and you will be able to learn the extent of my gratitude to you.’

In the remembrance of this was now no healing, for to remember it was to confront the blighting truth, that he to whom this hard-wrung pardon must be extended was her own father; the father in whom unconsciously she had prided, with pride all the deeper and more passionate, that his coldness had early chilled a daughter’s love from out her heart.

In a state of mind wherein impatience was curiously at odds with pity, Wylde sat that same evening with the doctor, engaged in discussing how best they could steer their course amid the shallows, in which, for the second time, it had pleased Fate to rule, that the current of their conjoint lives should thus be bound.

Formerly it was the doctor’s, now, for some occult reason, it was Wylde’s turn to wax restive, beneath the pressure of the foreign cares and responsibilities, that had managed to import themselves unbidden into his life.

‘I remember your once saying that we were

a set of fools, you and I, and all like us, not to have married, and had children of our own to plague ourselves with, instead of taking on us to meddle with those of other people. I thought it a far-fetched source of regret at the time; but I begin to see now that there was more wisdom in it than meets the eye.'

The doctor turned aside his head in order to hide the smile that, troubled as he was, overspread his shrewd features at this speech.

'Humph! my regret on the subject was very short-lived, I assure you. The pleasures of pater-nity are among those, on which my experience has long ago cured me of the tendency to set a fancy price. But it is no use at this time of day to take to moralizing. We have put our hands to the plough, you and I, and it is too late now to think of looking back.'

'I do not mean to do it; but I confess I thought our troubles were happily over, on the day when I landed Clarence Grace on Irish ground; and now this girl's obstinacy mars all, and leaves him and his son in worse plight than if the mystery had remained a mystery still. It will fall out just as Maurice had predicted; and the result will be that the poor fellow will wander off, as I did when I was like him, and then there is an end to the comfort of all our lives.'

'You are in one of your raven moods to-night, Wylde. When you have lived to be as old as I am, you will have learned to put greater faith in Time; but meanwhile try to believe a little more

in me. I take a far more sanguine view of things, and in doing so, I have common sense on my side. It seems to me that when we remember the nature, and the suddenness, of the calamities that have befallen this poor child, we have reason to be thankful, that, whereas they have driven the father to madness, they have had no worse effect on her, than to monster the family vice of pride somewhat out of sane proportions; which, inasmuch as it may tend to check despondency, is rather lucky than the reverse. Wait patiently awhile, until grief has had time to undermine the pride; and you will then hear a different story, unless I have studied womankind in vain.'

'Heaven grant you may be right, but I doubt it. What would you say to our bringing Clarence Grace upon her unawares? He exercised a strange influence over all of us long ago. Why not try the effect of it upon May, now?'

'You must not think of it! She says herself that the sight of him would kill her, and, without going so far, I still say that it could have none but mischievous results.'

'Suggest something better then,' said Wylde half pettishly; 'anything, so that I can be up and doing. Another week of what I have gone through since we landed, would soften my brain.'

'I could suggest something a great deal better, but that my having a clear personal interest in it, might cause you to mistrust it.'

'Out with it.'

'I would have you go back to the Tower, and

as soon as you can reconcile it to your sense of hospitality, quietly eject Maurice and his father. It would be a good plan to frighten them about one another; so quote me to any extent you please. Tell Maurice that, judging by your report of his father, I say that to winter in Ireland would play the deuce with him; and then tell Clarence Grace that Maurice must have immediate change of scene, and that I will not answer for the consequences, if he does not take him off to the continent forthwith. And then—here's the rub! then say to Martha, that if she wants to cover all her sins with one big act of charity, she will pack up, and come across here with you; and the pair of you will establish yourselves as heads of this motley household of ours, and so take the charge of those two poor girls off my hands.'

Wylde's face brightened.

'By Jove, a magnificent idea, if you can carry it out. But surely you are forgetting Lady Katherine, and her kinsfolk. It is not possible that she will leave her husband to the care of strangers, in his present state.'

The doctor laughed.

'You must have quite forgotten the experiences of your youth, or you would not venture to limit a fashionable lady's definition of the word, *possible*. It is not only possible, but it is already an accomplished fact, that her ladyship has left the care of her husband unreservedly to me; for which proof of confidence I thank her most sincerely, since,

troublesome though it is, it saves us all from having to act a part.

‘The history of the transaction is this.

‘As soon as I had a moment’s breathing time, which was not till the evening Percy died, I sat down, and wrote her an account of what had occurred. I worded my letter in such a manner, as that she might naturally infer from it, that Sir Hugh’s loss of reason was consequent on the shock of Percy’s death; and I stated my intention of conveying Sir Hugh directly for advice and change of scene to London, where I would be in readiness to receive her instructions in a few days.

‘I had expected that some of the kinsfolk you allude to, would have put in an appearance at the funeral; but I saw nothing of them until this morning, about an hour or two before your arrival, when I was waited on by a magnifico, who announced himself as Lord St Quentin, her ladyship’s brother, and the bearer of a letter from her, giving me plenary powers to do exactly what I pleased.

‘You must read her letter when you are in a mood to relish it, for it is a masterpiece in its way.

‘The sum of it comes to this, that her ladyship’s state of health is such, that her physicians have peremptorily ordered her to shun all excitement, especially of a painful nature—the woman is as robust as a milkmaid, though by inadvertently hinting as much, I lost her favour;—and that, consequently, her friends and family had resolutely opposed themselves to her longing

desire, to devote herself to the care of "poor dear Sir Hugh."

'She is about, she adds, to quit England with her brother, Lord St Quentin, and his wife, to pass the autumn and winter in Italy; and would, therefore, beg me to charge myself with the care of Sir Hugh till her return, knowing that he could not be in better hands. Lord St Quentin would be the bearer of her letter, and would do, or empower me to do, all that was necessary to facilitate my plans.

'Lord St Quentin did all that was necessary to facilitate my plans, by simply not asking to meddle with them. He is an individual of the extreme *far niente* type, very unlike her sprightly ladyship; and only roused himself into something like energy, when entreating me to comply with his sister's request, that I should charge myself with the care of Sir Hugh, and thereby enable them to postpone any question of proceedings in lunacy, or anything that might tend to bore himself, or embarrass his movements, at least until the spring, when he would be obliged to be in England again.

'I comforted him with the assurance, that by the spring it was more than likely that Sir Hugh would be in his grave. I am not to say much of an authority on mania myself, but from my knowledge of all the facts, I was able to make a pretty close calculation; and the men whom I have already met here—I had three of the leading ones with him last night, and again this morning—confirm

my opinion, and that is, that a few months, more or less, will be the utmost time that he can last.

‘I told Lord St Quentin this; and also said that as May was resolved to devote herself to her father, I was willing for her sake to undertake the charge of him. Therefore, as the case now stands, Sir Hugh is our property, to do what we please with, at least until the spring; which means, as I take it, that we have a lease of him for the remainder term of his days.

‘May clings desperately to the idea that he will regain his senses before he dies; a lucky one for herself, since the hope of being able to win him to repentance, will furnish her with a fresh incentive, not to sink meantime under her troubles, which, without it, it is quite likely she would do. Now, then, you see the personal interest that I have to serve, in trying to cajole you, and Martha. May will not desert her father; Nina will not leave May; and fate has thrust upon me the task of thinking and acting for all three. What more Christian deed, than for you and Martha to forsake your Tower for awhile, and come over here and take control of our household? The little woman’s presence would bring an atmosphere of home into a barrack-room; and I would trust much to the sedative influence of a real home feeling, for working a gradual cure in May. Do you agree?’

‘Of course I do, most cordially! but I am too wise by this time to answer for any woman. What do you suppose Martha will say?’

‘Tell her that you wish it, and the thing is done.’

‘I doubt you over-rate my power. Years ago I tested it, in the attempt to wring some admission from her, by which I could shape my course towards her and Maurice, and you saw yourself with what result. She would do it more readily at your asking than at mine.

‘Ask her in my name then,’ said the doctor drily. ‘So I get the thing done I will not sentimentalize over the motives. For the rest, our plan promises to work admirably. Mr Slade’s country partner is, as you know, Sir Hugh’s agent, and I can count on his simplifying all monetary dealings for us; but even should any unlooked-for hitch arise, it will not matter, for I have money of my own available, which will be more than sufficient to cover all the costs of the war. Carry out this idea for me, like the skilful soldier that you are, Wylde, and I will answer for it, that between us we shall conquer fate, and bring things to a happy issue, after all.’

‘Again I say, Heaven grant you may be right! but I doubt it.’

‘You need not. If she actually drives me to it, I have a sledge-hammer argument to employ with May, which must of necessity beat down all opposition; but it is one that I cannot use while her father lives, nor until we have first tried everything else. We will all do our best to soothe and strengthen her, and we will allow ample time for all acutely painful feelings to subside.

But if, after that, she persists in her refusal to marry Maurice, I mean to draw her attention to the fact that, in doing so, she cheats him of his inheritance, since he and his father are as tenacious of disgrace as she is, and will not claim it at the cost of their family name; whereas, by quietly marrying him, she gives him back his own without fuss, or exposure. Luckily for all parties, the estate can go to a woman—it came into the family over a century ago, with a Miss Deverell—so that, when once we bring May to her senses, all the rest is plain sailing; and the past can be set straight, so far as the inheritance is concerned, in just the same underhand fashion that it was set wrong.'

Wylde shook his head.

'That smacks of force, and Maurice will never consent to employ that.'

'We are not such fools as to ask his leave; and as to its smacking of force, therein lies our chief strength. My experience of the sex, and it is a pretty wide-spread one, led me long ago to the conclusion that, gentle and simple alike, there is nothing that a woman takes to half so kindly, as to the rôle of martyr. I do not mean to say that they are all the same, nor to deny that May is cut out on the most angelic pattern; but I do say, that I have known them positively to pine away for want of opposition, when a little tyrannical pressure put on them to make them do their own sweet will, would have revived them in five minutes. I do say that, given a thing to which

a woman has an inclination, you place her on the pinnacle of bliss when you *force* her to do it; and that May will be no exception to the rule. Of course she has a mind to marry this lad; it would be a queer thing if she had not, after what has passed. But, so long as she can be said to consult her own inclination, she will not look at him; whereas, prove to her that duty, and decency, and common honesty oblige her to it, and forthwith she accepts the martyr's palm with meekest resignation, and—and there is the whole thing set straight in a trice.'

'Good Heaven! what a callous cynic you are. If a lover were only listening to you now!'

'A lover may be listening to me, for all I know, or care to the contrary. But—' very seriously—'you wrong me when you call me callous. So long as Martha's story stood for the truth, no father could have felt more tender pity for his child, than I felt for May. But when it comes to a question of wrecking two lives through sheer overweening pride, I confess I would lose all patience, were it not that I put such unbounded faith in time.'

'You are very hard down upon pride.'

'I am; and no wonder. I could tell you a story, if I cared, of a man I knew once, whose youth was darkened by a woman's pride—pride as groundless and as sinful as this of May's; and if I named him, you would not wonder that he now and again deals the sex a smart rap of his tongue, by way of revenge. But I have talked enough to

bewilder you. Go you now, and bring me back Martha. I have more trust in her, woman though she is, than in the best-laid plans of a dozen old grey-beards like myself.'

Less sanguine far, but yet with the infectious influence of the more hopeful spirit strong upon him, Wylde, pausing only for one night's rest within its precincts, turned his back on the great city; and inly blessing the changed order of things, which no longer doomed the impatient traveller to keep pace with the snail, was soon again in his home.

Home, he might scarcely have felt it, save for the welcome that beamed on him from one among the three expectant pairs of eyes; for at sight of him, the other two darkened miserably, as his solitary presence told its tale of failure, without need of words.

'She *could* not come, Maurice. For Heaven's sake, do not look so. The doctor bids you not lose hope.'

'I had none to lose,' said Maurice quietly; and then turned away, mindful, even through this, that his father should not witness the horrible spasm, that gave the lie to his speech.

There was a long dreary pause, which none seemed to have the will to break.

'It is the penalty you have to pay for being my son,' said Clarence Grace at last. 'Would to God, I had never crossed your path!'

Whereupon, with a violence that shivered one of the lofty panes to fragments, Maurice dashed

open the window, and springing out, was instantly lost to view in the twilight shade of the wood beyond.

'That was unfair of you, Grace,' said Wylde, when the thrill caused by this stormy exit had subsided; 'You had no right to say that.'

But the moment the reproof had passed his lips, he regretted it, as he looked in his companion's face.

'To have lived through it all, for this!'

'My poor fellow, you have lived through it for a very fair reward. You have lived through it, to find a son who would not exchange you for the best woman in Christendom. But we should remember, you and I, that there was a day when a woman's frown, could darken the whole world for us. It must be so with him, too, for a time.'

'I will go to him.'

'No; leave him to himself for awhile, and sit down instead, and advise with Martha and me.'

And then, without a twinge of hospitable self-reproach, or other thought save promptly to execute his mission, Wylde unfolded the doctor's plan; the fitness and the advantages of which, it needed no special pleading on his part to make plain.

'It is hard upon you, Mattie, but you will do it? You have done harder things for us all, before now.'

Martha's eyes had filled.

'Harder things' she assuredly *had* done, in the sense of incurring hardship, but not any one thing from which she shrank so pitifully as from this;

not any one thing that involved, as this did, the sundering of so many ties, which she had taught herself to believe should endure till death.

She had lived many heavy hours beneath its roof—hours weighted down with dread, and care, and sorrow, and mayhap self-reproach; but yet to quit the grey old Tower was to tear body and soul asunder, for to quit it was to leave behind for ever the dear old life, that, though chequered, had been so infinitely precious to her; to trust herself to the chances of a future, from which even the little of sobered light that yet shone round her, might be struck out.

She felt all this, but she said only: 'Of course I will go, and welcome. Why should I hold back if I can be of any use?' and then sat quietly listening, while Wylde went on to sketch in their plan of proceedings; midway in which process he stopped short, as Maurice made his appearance among them again.

He came silently up to Martha's chair, and bent over her:

'Mother, will you do something to please me?'

'Only ask me, dear.'

'Will you and Wylde break up house here for awhile, and go over to London, to Nina and May? Wherever you go, you have the knack of bringing home with you; and a home-feeling would be good for all of them, for the doctor as well as the rest.'

'And what will become of you, if I do that?'

'I will meantime take my father off for a long ramble somewhere, and try to prove to him that I

am willing to pay *any* penalty, that may attach to being *his* son.'

Wylde laughed; not that there was much that was mirth-provoking in the few quiet words, but that the likeness between master and pupil struck him, often as he had before observed it, with comic force.

'The doctor caught you young, Maurice. The pair of you think and speak like one man.'

'You will do it, then?'

'Of course we will; we were settling the details of just such a plan when you came in. But I say, Mattie, for a little woman of your housewifely propensities, you are strangely inhospitable. Here am I a hungry traveller, and I positively believe that you mean me to go supperless all night.'

* * * * *

The doctor and Maurice proved to be true prophets as regarded the home-supplying effect of Martha's presence; for beneath her skilful guidance, life in the old house at Kensington, which, after one exhaustive survey of its capabilities, Wylde had pitched upon, as the temporary abode of the composite tribe over which he was called to rule as chieftain, had soon come to run in its daily groove as noiselessly and freely, as though no dark excess of crime and misery formed the bond, that bound together the strangely-assorted group, now assembled beneath one roof.

But if much of the soothing influence that quickly diffused itself around, was unquestionably

due to Martha, not a little was fairly attributable to Wylde, who, in his intense yearning pity for the one, and his cordial new relations with the other of his more youthful charges, developed a thousand winning traits of character, of which those even who knew him best had scarce credited him the possession; which set the doctor many a time musing, more in the pathetic vein than in the cynical, on the waywardness of fortune, which to those by whom they are oftentimes deemed but doubtful blessings, had given wife and children, while this man, with his vast capacity for loving, stood solitary and loveless; not even the ghost of a buried sorrow now remaining, to fill the wintry void in his heart.

To May, looking back on the story of those days, it seemed that but for him—not for Martha, nor Nina, nor the doctor, tender and loving as they were, but for him—life or reason must have given way, beneath the load of anguish, and horror, and self-loathing, which, ere yet the doctor's prophecy had reached fulfilment, ere sorrow had had time to undermine pride, pressed upon her, with a crushing force which she no longer had strength to resist.

Martha had wept with her, the doctor had reasoned, Nina had sought to soothe; and one and all had left her as they had found her, grateful unspeakably for their efforts, but longing none the less that the end was come, when she might lie down and die.

Wylde attempted nothing of the three. He

simply did by her as, with the premature wisdom of bygone days, she had done by him, accepted her, in the wayward change wrought in her by shame and misery, as she had accepted him in his Saul-like, as well as in his genial moods; and, seeking neither to constrain nor modify, strove by a cunning process of self-adaptation, which one might have thought that only a more supple character could achieve, to lead her back into the world of commonplace every-day thoughts and feelings, to the myriad healing influences of which, far more than to the doctor's redoubted ally, Time, he was willing to entrust her cure.

But among the details of that daily life, though rich in the seeds of much that poet and novelist would love to garner up, we may not pause, save to sketch in the one solitary episode that might be said to brighten it, and wanting which, our story would be singularly incomplete.

Of that episode not May but Nina was the heroine, as even the obtusest of story readers is expected, at the first note of warning, to be able to divine.

To Nina, sympathizing heart and soul with the sorrows of those with whom her fate was so closely bound up; hourly witnessing the dire results of the crime of which her own hapless lover was but the *weakest* victim, it had come of late to be a familiar experience, the sensation of oft-recurring self-reproach, with which, as time ebbed slowly by, she awoke to the full consciousness, that the death of that same hapless lover had

scarce deepened the gloom that long had wrapped her; that, tender and true and trustful though he was, his memory was already waning dim and shadowy, while that of another, of whom full abiding trustfulness was *not* the characteristic, was again as freshly present with her, as in that ill-starred hour when they had parted, with vows as fondly passionate as 'ever men have broke' trembling upon his lips.

In especial was this haunting sensation full upon her one chill morning in November, as, standing before her glass, in the act of equipping for an early walk with Wylde, the fact made itself glaringly manifest, that the beauty that pain had for a brief season dimmed, was again blooming forth in unclouded brilliance; no pallor on cheek or brow giving evidence of the rooted sorrow, *not* to feel which, was to be guilty of infidelity to the dead.

'It must be that I have no heart—that he killed it with that cruel letter;' said the girl sadly. 'If I had a heart, how could I so soon cease to grieve for my poor boy who loved me so well?'

She turned away, no vain consciousness of her enchanting loveliness deepening the flush on her cheek; and descending to the dining-room, where she knew that she would find Wylde awaiting her, opened the door, and went in.

Absorbed, as, whatever her mood, almost every woman can for the moment become, in each detail of dress, in the accurate moulding on of her

gloves, she was already close to the fire-place, when she grew suddenly aware that Wylde was not the sole occupant of the apartment; and lifting her eyes, beheld standing side by side with him on the hearth, unchanged, save that his radiant aspect was now clouded over to somewhat of the 'faded splendour wan' of the Miltonic hero, another scarce less lofty of aspect than himself; that other *Philip Oriel, Lord Normanton!* the man who, cruel and faithless though she had proved him, still held sway within the heart, which a true lover's tried devotion had failed to win.

How Nina looked, and what she felt, we might not in the compass of one short paragraph seek to say. What she did, was to turn and walk back towards the door; ere reaching which the younger man had sprung forward, and gained her side.

'I never wrote it, Nina! My mother is dead, and on her death-bed she told me——'

He broke off, pride and bitter anger plainly at war with the shame that crimsoned his face; then, steadying his voice, brought the passionate speech into which he had plunged so abruptly, to a quiet close.

'She forged that letter in order to part us; and on her death-bed she told me of it, and bade me come to you, to ask you to pardon her if you can. I am here to do her bidding to-day.'

She was a soldier's daughter, and trained amid alarms which had made her proof against sudden shock; but against shock like this, our Nina was

as poorly guarded, as is the weakest-minded woman that ever took her law from the lips of a man.

One desperate look she cast around, as though appealing for help to Wylde; but Wylde was nowhere to be seen. Whereupon, with as little effort at self-control, as though the blood of all the Desmonds were not awaiting vindication at her hands, she sank down on the seat that opportunely stood close by, and burst into a paroxysm of tears.

Now of tears as of gold it may be said, that they 'speak in every tongue, to every purpose;' a happy dispensation, since in many a panic, where words refuse to muster, they are ever ready to come boldly to the front; doubly happy in a crisis like the present, inasmuch as where words could scarce be bent from their one plain meaning, tears can be interpreted to imply everything and anything, that each interpreter pleases to assume.

In what sense Nina's were translated matters not. That the construction put upon them was no forced one, Wylde gathered in at a glance, when, an hour later, duly mindful of the *convénances* which it was his especial province to guard, he reappeared upon the scene.

'So! you have made your peace, I see. You took her in an unusually pliant mood, believe me, for I found her far more difficult to appease.'

Nina looked up, wistful and tender; the love-light there was no mistaking, seated in her shining eyes.

'It was not his fault; you must not blame

him. I have promised him that no one shall ever speak of it again.'

'No one shall, dear, with my consent. I see no reason why it need go beyond you and me.'

'*Ma mère* must know it, and Maurice too. Maurice knows the wrong story already. We must tell him the right one now.'

The narrative of which Philip Oriel had come to disburden himself, of which already he had put Wylde in possession, was in its nature such as a son must be desirous to suppress.

From the early days of her marriage with Sir Hugh Grace, it had been, it appeared, a favourite project of Lady Katherine to effect a union between her heiress stepdaughter, and the penniless son of the kinswoman to whom she was particularly attached.

Of this project the young man was entirely ignorant, up to the period of his going to India, where his father held a high civil appointment; and where he met Nina, who, while Captain Desmond was on active service with his regiment, was stopping with some friends at a distance from the scene of war.

'I was old enough,' he frankly admitted in telling his tale to Wylde, 'to have been wiser and more honourable, than to have involved so mere a child in a clandestine engagement. But though I knew nothing of my mother's plan about May Grace, I was well aware that it was her purpose to marry me to a wife with money; and not caring—not *daring*, would be the better word, for she

always had terrible control of me—to thwart her, until I was in a position to assert my own will, and dreading, on the other hand, to leave Nina free in a country, where any hour a pluckier or a richer man might carry her off before my eyes, I had recourse to the coward's alternative of concealment; and made her engage herself to me, at the same time binding her to keep the engagement secret, even from her father, until such time as I had procured a post which had been promised to me, when I was at once to seek Captain Desmond, and ask his consent to an immediate marriage.

‘It was not till one day, when my mother chanced to repeat before me some absurd scandal, about the poor child having encouraged the attentions of a Major Colville, a man of such noted profligacy of character, that for a woman even to admit him to acquaintance, was to warrant the worst suspicions—it was not till then that I betrayed myself; for, knowing the story to have been originally trumped-up by Colville, in revenge for Nina having openly slighted him, I could not do other than contradict it on the spot; and, by way of adding weight to my words, declare my engagement to her, and my determination to make her my wife.

‘I shall never forget the storm of anger into which this announcement threw my mother. She raged and threatened and entreated by turns. And at last, finding I was bent on going my own way, she resolved, as she confessed to me on her death-bed, three weeks ago, to part me from Nina at

any cost ; caring very little what I might suffer, so that she could achieve her end of securing me the fortune, without which, it seemed to her, that the empty title I must one day inherit could not be maintained.'

How she effected her purpose, the reader hardly needs to be told.

Under pretence of visiting some friends, she travelled down to the station, where she had learned that Nina was in attendance on her sick father ; and though the circumstances in which she found the desolate girl, were such as would have moved most women to compassion, persisted inexorably in carrying out the object she had in view.

She had furnished herself with a letter, purporting to be written by her son ; 'a bitter letter,' as Nina truly called it, for in it the lover was made to say, not only that he believed the slanderous tale, but even that her readiness to enter into a secret engagement with himself, was a proof in his eyes of her anxiety to retrieve her position in the world, at the cost of his fair name ; that for her father's sake, he would endeavour to suppress scandal, but that all between them was for ever at an end.

Nina's letter in reply, was such that the mother found no need to tamper with it ; though prepared for that, or for any other course she might deem it expedient to adopt.

Too proud and too miserable to care for self-defence, the girl did precisely what her wily foe would have prompted her to do ; namely, made no allusion to the forged letter, but simply re-

turned the ring that he had given her, with a few cold words, to the effect that he was not such a one as her father would have chosen that she should marry; and that by the dying command of the latter, she was about to go to Europe, to make her home with his early friends.

‘This letter, which my mother at once forwarded to me, as if it had been sent by Nina direct, coupled with the certain intelligence, which I received on going to the spot to demand an explanation, that Nina had left for Europe under the care of Mr Cronin, to whom report said that her father had affianced her, left me nothing to believe but that she had changed her mind, and had thrown me over for another, and, as I naturally concluded, a richer man.

‘I never suspected anything, as how could I? Little though my mother would let me love her, I yet trusted her implicitly, and never dreamed of the lengths to which passion had carried her, until I heard the story from her own lips. I owe some amends to Captain Cronin for my discourtesy when we met at the Chase; but I am sure, that when he hears my apology, he will hold it a sufficient one. I looked upon him as the man who had outrivalled me; and had I known beforehand, who would be my neighbours at Deverell, I would have stayed away, and so avoided the mortification of rendering myself singularly distasteful to Miss Grace.’

Such was the substance of the confession which Lord Normanton had made to Wylde; which, told

over to Nina with a due infusion of pathos and penitence, had resulted in the beatific state of things, of which the despondent lover had not permitted himself to dream.

‘I came here to do a simple act of justice, not daring to hope but that my darling was already lost to me. And now to find that she is still mine, and willing to forgive all——’

‘Is enough to turn your very good-looking head on your shoulders,’ put in the doctor, who, making his appearance a little later on that auspicious afternoon, had the secret, in which by this time Martha had been made participator, told over by common consent to him. ‘Young man, I am ready magnanimously to forgive you, so long as I find that you have done nothing against *me*; but in Nina’s place I would make you smart for having come courting our poor little May. What have you to say in excuse for that?’

‘It was for May to forgive that, which she did long ago. I shall be always terribly afraid of you, Dr Egan, for you saw through me from the first.’

‘I saw through a right good fellow,’ said the doctor cordially. Whereupon Nina felt there was no further dread of non-approval; that Philip Oriel had found his way into the favour of each one of the band of trusty friends, who numbered all in the world whom she craved to please.

* * * *

But though rejoicing warmly in the change that had brought such happiness for one among

their number, it was not to be denied that the coming of Lord Normanton was a source of grave embarrassment, scarcely less to Nina herself, than to the others, with whom his new relations towards her brought him necessarily into constant intercourse.

The young man was himself the first to allude openly to a theme, which the others had hitherto by tacit agreement shunned; but which, when once he had seen May, and noted the lamentable change which a few short months had wrought in her, it was idle to seek longer to ignore.

‘I am not so dull but that I see I am an intruder,’ he said, when, after a vain effort to preserve composure, May had quitted the room, ‘and that a mystery of some sort lies at the bottom of the changed order of things which I witness here. So much as I know of what happened since I left Ireland, I learned from Lady Katherine, whom I met in the autumn in Nice, where I had taken my mother for her health; and all she told me was, that Percy had died suddenly, and that the shock of his death had unsettled Sir Hugh’s mind. Under the circumstances, I feel bound to leave it to all here to dispose of me. If you think best to banish me for a time, I will go. If, on the other hand, the secret be one you are free to share, I need not say that you may trust me with it, as fearlessly as you trust yourselves.’

‘The secret is one we are *not* free to share,’ said the doctor, after pondering the question; ‘at least until we can take counsel with others, who

are concerned in it as much as we are. At the same time I see no justice in banishing you, nor no great use either, unless we could banish you altogether; for you could not be one of us long, without divining something near the truth, and since that must happen soon or late, as well now as six months or a year hence. My decision would be, that you stay among us; simply pledging your honour—the rest of us are bound by oath, but your word of honour will suffice—that *whenever*, and *however*, the secret comes to your knowledge, you will be silent about it as the grave.'

This pledge gladly given, with the oath voluntarily added which the doctor had not chosen to exact, had the effect of allaying somewhat of the sickening apprehension with which May had heard of the new arrival. And as, obviously, the young man had eyes or ears for no one but Nina, and troubled himself as little as son of Eve could possibly do about things not appointed for him to know, his presence not alone soon ceased to be any check upon their freedom, but came to be accepted, by even May herself, as a welcome brightening of the gloom, which, as time wore on, deepened round them; bringing with it the consciousness, that swiftly nearing them was a perilous crisis, the final issues of which none dared venture to forecast.

And at length, with the advent of the holy Christmas-time, came the hour, wherein was to be granted the fruition of the hope, that had made her one frail hold upon life; the hour when the cloud was in mercy uplifted, and, with the dying

sinner's hands locked in hers, May could speak of the blessedness of penitence, of the promise made to the 'wicked who repenteth,' and, so speaking, know that her words fell not now on the ears of the insensate; that the reason that had gone out in wrong-doing, had been rendered back, to point the path by which pardon might be won.

The doctor had spoken confidently of the coming of the time, when sorrow should have undermined pride. That time came to May when she stood by her father's death-bed, and witnessed the last grim conflict between the angel sent to rescue, and the evil thing that 'fillet with maledictions him that holdeth'; the spirit of darkness that till now she, too, had worshipped as a God.

She had thought that only with her heart's blood could she write the words that must speak of pride for ever shattered, that must bring her once more face to face with the victims of her father's sin.

When at length they left her hand, pride and self, and all things earthly, were far from her, blotted out by the all-effacing fear, that her pitiful act of atonement had come too late; that through her ruthless sentence of banishment, the pardon that could bring peace to the soul of the dying, might not be uttered now on this side of the grave.

CHAPTER VIII.

TO Clarence Grace, wandering with his son in search of that, which those who seek are ever the last to find, there came in the Advent of that same holy Christmas time a letter, fit harbinger of the angel message, soon to be spoken to all the peoples of the earth :

‘ My father has recovered his reason, and implores you to come to him, that he may hear you say you pardon him before he dies. He is sinking fast, therefore, if you will comply with his prayer, you have not an hour to lose. You once said to me, that for my sake you would try to forgive your enemies. You can do that for God’s love only; but I entreat you for *my* sake to hasten, if you would spare me the remorse of feeling, that my pride and selfishness have robbed my father of the comfort of receiving his pardon from your own lips.

‘ MAY.’

* * * * *

It was the eve of the day of promise, a few hours only from the moment when, through the length and breadth of every Christian land, should

resound the good tidings, that the reign of peace at length was come, when father and son reached the old house at Kensington, on the threshold of which they were met by Arthur Wylde.

‘Thank Heaven, you are in time! But Maurice, my poor fellow, what brings you here? this is no place yet awhile for you.’

‘I have a message for him, that will comfort him; something that Percy bade me tell him, if ever he should come back to his mind.’

‘Ah, that alters things. In that case you had better be the first to see him, for he is sinking fast, and the meeting with your father will try him terribly. Come with me and I will bring you to him; your father can wait here a moment until I return for him.’

Hastening back, after he had committed Maurice to the hands of the doctor, he found Clarence Grace pacing the floor, in a disorder of step and aspect very foreign to his wonted mood.

‘Is it possible, Wylde, that this girl refuses to meet me? Has she summoned me here for such a purpose, and does she persist in holding aloof from us, as if I and my son were monsters who——’

‘Gently, my good friend, gently! The poor child is waiting alone to receive you, whenever you desire to see her; but you must put on your very meekest mood, if you do not want the sight of you to kill her outright. To see you as you looked just now, would go far to verify her words.’

‘You would not find it easy to be meek,’ said

Clarence falteringly, 'if you had watched him for months as I have done, and knew that his heart was breaking slowly before your eyes. God sees, it is a hard thing to forgive.'

'God sees it is!' said Wylde emphatically, the tone and words forcibly recalling, little though he meant it, to the mind of the listener, the hour in which he, with the sense of fancied injury strong upon him, had bowed his pride of soul to the level of the meekest. And then no more was said, as they mounted the broad staircase arm-in-arm, and paused outside the door, opening which, Wylde motioned to his companion to enter the apartment alone.

'I am come to redeem my promise,' said Clarence Grace, as the black-draped figure rose at his approach, and stood mutely awaiting him on the hearth. 'I said that for your sake I would try to forgive my enemies—for your sake, and out of gratitude to you; and I have done it. I am here to make good my words.'

'Not for my sake! Oh, not for mine.'

'For yours, I say; and for yours only.'

He took the hands lifted to him in piteous entreaty, and holding them firmly grasped, looked sternly down into the shrinking face; a sadly changed face now from the long past hour, when, softly radiant as a youthful seraph's, it had gazed pityingly down into his.

'For your sake I can do this, May; but I warn you, that when I have done it, I have done all that can be asked from mortal man. I can forgive.

your father; I have already forgiven him, or I would not be here. But as God will judge me, child, I never *can* pardon you, if you rob me of my son.'

With a feeble cry of pain May strove to free herself from his clasp.

'Have pity on me! I am dying.'

'Nay, Heaven forbid! You come of a race that can endure a great deal, and yet live. Listen to me! look at me! You ask for pity, but it is for you to show it. I have lived through an age of misery, and now you would rob me of the one thing left to me. I have got but him, and I see him dying before my eyes, and it is you who are killing him. O child, if you knew what real anguish is! if despair had gnawed away your heart, as it has done mine, you would make but a small account of pride!'

'It is not pride,' said the girl brokenly, 'it is not pride *now*. But some one must pay the penalty of my father's sin. The curse *must* fall on me, and—he would have to share it, if——'

A sudden light flashed to Clarence Grace's eyes.

'Is this your thought? Is this what you think should part you?'

He drew her to him until the white, quivering face was hidden on his breast.

'My poor child, have you forgotten that, if there be a curse upon you, we all already share it? Do you forget that the seed of all this evil was sown, not by your father, but by mine? that I and my son are heirs to it, as well as you?'

'Say one word to comfort me,' he went on, when the silence between them had endured long enough to become a pain; 'tell me that I am not to be left childless in my old age, and then I will leave you, and go to your father. I will be none the less tender with him, if I can feel that he has given me you to compensate me for the past.'

The one re-assuring word May had just then no power to speak; but, instead, she lifted the hand that lay on her shoulder, and, before he could guess at, to frustrate her purpose, had pressed it to her lips. And then, with a brief 'God bless you,' he turned away, and, with how much of mortal, deep repugnance, who can tell? went forth to the task appointed him; the task of bridging over the gulf of dark despairing years, that rolled between him and the hour, when last he had stood in presence of the inhuman brother of his blood.

She had borne up bravely enough so far; but left to herself May sank to her knees, and with the influence of the scene and of the hour strong upon her, buried her face in her hands, and fell to trembling as at sight of a ghost.

With one stroke of the heaven-born skill, bestowed seldom but by chance only, Clarence Grace had effected much, that appeal and stern argument had striven for in vain; had half wrought the work of self-reconciliation, which, when completed, would restore her to life and hope. But now all thought of self was still far from her, as with every faculty strained to the uttermost, she knelt and

waited, listening for the summons that should tell her that the end was at length at hand.

In the ghostly hush of the coming midnight, she could catch the murmur of voices from within the chamber, where was being enacted the closing scene of the long-enduring tragedy, that held the story of so many lives; could image forth the strife there waging between God's all-potent grace, and the evil spirits that ever throng around the death-bed of the late repentant; could share, with the one trembling soul in its agony of abasement, with the other, in the dread upheaving of human passions, that at the bidding of no human voice might again be stilled.

Amid all the experiences of after years, even while life's best light shone round her, May never lost the remembrance of that terrible death-watch; never called to mind but with a sickening shudder the perilous hour of conflict, when, sinking beneath the awful sense of helplessness, of isolation from mortal aid and sympathy, that in each such crisis awaits us all, she knelt, and, as though face to face with the powers of darkness, did battle for the parting soul.

Coming upon her in any hour but this, the sorely-tried lover perchance had found that the hydra, pride, though well-nigh crushed for ever, had yet another head to rear against him. Coming upon her in this hour; looking down into hers with eyes, all passionate love, and anguish, and entreaty; speaking her name in tones that jarred, because the music of the man's life had

been broken, and might not be attuned again, save slowly, and by her hand alone, what wonder that that heavy sentence of banishment on the instant should reverse itself? that with a cry of joy, as at sight of one come to rescue when hope had fled, she should turn to him, and, clasped to his bosom, should forget that there was aught of bitterness in the bondage thus accepted? forget all, save that the fearful death-in-life to which she had doomed herself was ended; that he was given back to her, never to be sundered from her on this side the grave?

It was no season for rapture, for the outpouring of ecstatic commonplaces, which to each of the myriad spell-bound ones, that listen to or utter them, embody more than the ripest wisdom of the sage. But there was no need here of raptures, no need of words, while heart throbbing close to heart, spoke such language, as not the most golden-tongued of lovers could translate.

Once only did Maurice break the silence, that no longer was terror-fraught to her sense.

‘You said that the sight of me would kill you. I can never forget that while I live.’

At which May looked up; the blue eyes, in which the waters had long seemed frozen, gleaming darkly from intense emotion, through her tears.

‘I was mad when I said that. I thought that when you knew you were *his* son, you could not help shrinking from me, and—the day you come to do that, I shall pray to die.’

‘Stay but till then,’ was the substance of the

lover's thought; but simple though it was, he lacked power to express it, so instead he bent, and silenced the trembling lips with a kiss. And then the pair sat mutely waiting, until presently, when the solemn hush had deepened to the verge of midnight, was heard the summons, that told them that the end at last was come.

Of the death-bed of the sinner, whether going before his God impenitent, or with guilt atoned for, as far as mortal's weak repentance may atone, able hands have left us many a picture, which it would be mere presumption in the less skilled to attempt to heighten by one touch.

Of the death-bed, then, of this hapless sinner, who had paid such awful penalty for sin; whose life had for years been one long galling slavery to the coward tyrant, Fear, to whom to lie in bondage is the last gloomy penance of the proud—of such a scene we will essay no portrayal; with a theme fitted rather for the preacher than for the storyteller, we will not rashly tamper, satisfied that such task was never meant for faltering pen like ours.

Enough, that round that closing scene clung none but solemn memories, of which each succeeding year but strengthened the blessed power to heal. Enough for the three alone who witnessed it the remembrance, that it was at the dawning of the day of promise when the humbled spirit winged its flight; that the bells that tolled the requiem of the parted soul, were the same that ever bear back to our strife-bewildered world the echo of the

angels' hymn, wherein 'Glory to God in the highest' was but chanted in equal note of acclaim with, 'Peace on earth to men of good will!'

* * * * *

And yet, after all had been said and done, the doctor had still to wield that sledge-hammer argument, which he had kept in reserve wherewith to deal the final blow to pride, or to whatsoever malign influence should uprear itself in opposition to his will.

Pride it was not that called for strenuous treatment, for pride, as we have striven to show, had received its death-blow already, at other hands than his; a fact which, at the cost of his credit for consistency, we must admit that he realized with a sigh, on discovering that he had to cope instead with an adversary still more insidious, though apparently less formidable by far.

For many days after he had carried her in his arms from her father's death-bed, and taken her to his own undivided care, fear lay very heavy at the bottom of the doctor's heart; fear all the more pressing that he had to keep it to himself, since to impart it, was to deepen the gloom and sadness, that already made an atmosphere most uncongenial with his mind.

She had prayed to live, had *resolved* to live, that she might be at his side to win him to repentance, when the hoped-for hour should come, in which her father could hear her with intelligence; had, (as often, in reviewing the history of some grievous time put past, it must have seemed

to us all, that we too had done unconsciously,) garnered up, as it were, strength sufficient to last her, until that one so vital thing was done. But, her task ended, she collapsed suddenly; and, prostrate in mind and body, sank wearily down, with, as at first the anxious watcher deemed, a feeble chance alone remaining, that she should ever find strength to rise again.

Perhaps one of the heaviest periods of the doctor's life, was that comprised within the days that intervened between Sir Hugh's death, and the arrival of the inert Lord St Quentin; whose presence was deemed necessary to complete the train of mourners, who should convey the deceased to Ireland, for interment at the Chase.

During all those days the girl lay without speech or motion, scarcely a pulse beating to show that she still retained her hold on life; the grateful look in the patient little face, blanched now to the hue of the snowdrop, to which old Matt had touchingly enough compared her, alone bespeaking her consciousness of his sleepless care. And during those days too, turn which way he would, he was haunted by another face, bloodless too, and haggard, and with great dark eyes, that hungrily sought to read in his the sentence he would fain withhold; until at length nerves and fortitude both threatened to desert him, and he was forced to unbosom himself to Martha, the only one permitted access to the sick girl's room.

'The long and short of it is, Martha, that you must get that young man out of the house with

the others. The sight of him is beginning positively to unman me; and when it comes to that with me it is time I had a change.'

'You do not mean that you would send him from the place, and not let him be at hand if—if anything was to happen to Miss May?'

'I mean precisely that, and nothing less. My best, rather my only, chance of saving May depends on my being left quietly to myself; and therefore I must be rid for a time of him. The sight of him unmans me, I tell you, and I want to be at my coolest, and to have all my wits about me just now. On the one side to see May, and on the other to have him and his father haunting one like a pair of uneasy spirits, is more than flesh and blood could bear.'

'Weary on it, for a world of sin and sorrow!' said Martha tearfully. 'No sooner we have one great trouble put past us, than there is another as heavy on our backs instead. Dear knows but I thought, after that awful night in the Tower, that if he would only come back to me, and let me get one look at him, I could die happy; and now that I have him back, what have I but a sore heart for my pains? To see my darling boy, with his hair growing gray with the dint of sorrow, and his poor cheeks as thin as paper—sure, it is more like twin brothers they are this minute, than like father and son! not to speak of Arthur, roaming up and down, as you say, like an uneasy spirit, is more——'

'Arthur will come to, soon enough,' inter-

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rupted the doctor unfeelingly; 'I am at present much more alarmed about myself than about him. You all seem to think that I am made of stone or iron, and can bear anything; but you are mistaken. I was never so near knocking under to sheer worry and anxiety as I am now; and if Maurice does not start for Ireland to-morrow with the others, I will not answer for being able to stand the house another day.'

Martha was terribly abashed.

It was seldom indeed that the doctor took to snubbing her; all as seldom that he spoke thus of his feelings or of himself; and now that he had done both, the effect of the twofold process was annihilating.

'If you would just bid him go yourself,' she said feebly. 'He would be sure to get round me and pick the truth out of me in five minutes; and then he would mind one word from you, more than he would a dozen said by me.'

On reflection the doctor deemed this very probable. Therefore when, on next quitting the sick room, he found Maurice as usual doing sentinel without, he thought it best to initiate the matter without further delay.

A letter had a few hours previously been received from Lord St Quentin, stating that he would reach London that night; and as all was in readiness before his arrival, the funeral train was to leave early next morning for Ireland. Hitherto, however, nothing had been said as to whether or not Maurice would accompany it, though it was

shrewdly suspected on all hands, that left to himself Maurice would seek to hold his ground where he was.

His first words when the doctor flatly announced his resolve to eject him, were in substance what Martha had said already.

‘She is dying, and you want to be rid of me.’

‘One-half of that statement is quite correct.

I do want to be rid of you; *not* because she is dying, but because you are fidgeting me into a fever, at the time when I want to be as cool as a cucumber. I begin to realize, since you have been here, what people mean by being haunted, not but that I would rather face an army of phantoms, than to have you following me about, seeking to eat my very heart out with your eyes.’

‘I will keep out of your way,’ pleaded Maurice; ‘I will not let you see me, if only——’

‘My dear fellow, go quietly away for a few days, and you will do all I ask. You are bound to go, were it only as a mark of respect to this unfortunate man; for you must admit that it will look strange for Normanton, and your father, and Wylde to be present at his funeral, and for you to hold aloof; but independently of that, I would not, in your place, let your father go without me. He persists in going, though Wylde and I have done our utmost to dissuade him, and—— Well, I do not think that you are exactly in a state to be lectured, but this much I must say; that considering how little of a comfort you have been to him since his return, you should sacrifice your

own feelings now, in order to stand by him through this. Remember what an ordeal this is to him, and how——'

'At least you will let me see her before I go?'

'Far better not. I have excluded even Nina, and to let her see you, would be to incur a most needless risk. What can you have to say? She has promised to marry you, has she not? Clarence told me that she had.'

'Yes. Almost the last thing before he died, her father put her hand in mine, and heard her promise it. O God! to lose her after that!'

'With Heaven's help, you shall not lose her. Trust her to me, and you may believe me that before you have well reached Ireland, I shall send you news that will make you a different man!'

The words were in some sort prophetic; for, ere many hours had elapsed after their departure, the girl emerged from her death-like apathy, and, as though with the removal of that woeful presence a crushing weight had been lifted from her heart, came slowly and falteringly back to life.

The first tokens of the salutary change, of which, even while confidently predicting it, he had entertained but a doubtful hope, greeted the doctor in the evening, on his return from accompanying the funeral procession the first stage of its homeward way.

He had left her silent and passive, with blue eyes once more frozen over, as though they could never melt again. He found her bathed in tears, and trembling with pained excitement; which the

moment she saw him, broke into convulsive sobs.

‘They have taken him away for ever, and I had not strength to go to look at him, to kiss his poor sad face once more. My father, my poor unhappy father, whom I never dared to love, until it was too late!’

‘It was not too late, my child. Your love in the end had power to save him, and to make the remembrance of his death-bed a blessing to yourself. Few of us, May, can lay such a comfort to our souls as that.’

Beyond this he forbore remark ; but, as a set-off against his reticence, he admitted Nina, convinced that here was one of the cases with which a female practitioner was more competent to deal than he, and betook himself, meantime, to the company of another such in the person of Martha, who was ever ready to sympathize with each alternating mood.

But the next day, although May was strong enough to be dressed and carried to a couch in the adjoining room, the reaction had again set in ; and she lay back, no longer, indeed, in the chill apathy that had disheartened him, but yet so utterly unnerved and listless, as to suggest the fear that last night’s promise of amendment might be but a delusive one, after all.

It was in this phase of the case that the doctor bethought him of his sledge-hammer ; and, acting on the kill-or-cure impulse, which, if they could be got to admit it, might be found to guide others

of his craft when in a like strait, made up his mind to put it in requisition forthwith.

He waited patiently for more hopeful symptoms all that day; but on the next, seeing no encouraging signs, resolved to delay no longer.

Without any preface, he began:

'May, my dear, do you know that unless you make an effort, a good, vigorous effort, to rouse yourself, you will die?'

May looked quietly up, nowise startled at his abruptness.

'What can I do? I do not think that I can live.'

'Hm! do you not? That is a pity, considering the consequences. Have you ever reflected on what will befall Maurice and his father, in the event of your death?'

To this question the answer came far more slowly.

'I know that *he* will grieve for me a long time, perhaps all his life, but I cannot help it. It is too late to think of living now.'

'I am not alluding to his grief,' said the doctor curtly; 'the consequences I speak of are legal ones, which I suppose you have not deemed worth a thought. Has it never struck you, May, that by your refusal to marry Maurice you were perpetuating a huge injustice? that if you die now without having married him, you place your father's acts beyond all remedy, and make his repentance, so far as this world is concerned, a mere dead letter after all?'

Scared and trembling, May suddenly rose.

‘I—I do not understand you.’

‘Sit still, child, and I will make my meaning plain to you. Every acre of the land, every guinea of the gold, that should by right go to Clarence Grace——’

‘They are all his now! They were his from the first! You do not think that I would touch——’

‘Tut! to hear a girl of your intelligence talk such nonsense! Everything that is his by right is yours in law. If you die to-morrow, or before you reach the age of twenty-one, it goes, every tittle of it, to a man whom you have never even heard of—one who has nothing in common with you but his name; and Clarence and his son stand in future as they stand to-day, with the labour of their head and hands alone, to keep them in bread. Now do you see why you must not die, unless——’

‘Papa—why did not he try to remedy this?’

‘He thought to do it, poor man, but to no purpose. Once Percy was gone he had, indeed, the power to make a will, for luckily a small portion only of the estate is entailed. But no will of his could stand five minutes, in face of the fact that he had been out of his mind so lately; above all, one disinheriting his own child, in favour, apparently, of a stranger. The next heir would have a voice in disputing it, no matter what course you and your friends might choose to adopt.’

‘But it is *his*,’ persisted May with a passionateness that augured well of her strength to make the effort demanded, as she rose and stood before

him, 'it is *his*, I say! I will not bear to be told that I am robbing him—that if I die the sin will be on me! He has but to publish who he is, and——'

With very gentle violence the doctor brought her back to her place.

'Hush! do not talk so wildly! above all, do not insult him, whatever you do. He has but to publish who he is, you say, and so cover himself and his son, and you and your father, and his own parents before him, with dishonour. Well, he is not likely to do that. But, even if he tried to do it, I doubt if he would effect much; for the law is a stiff old sceptic, May, and would ask proofs more than he could, perhaps, produce. My child, there is but the one way of righting things, and that not a very harsh one, as it seems to me. Marry this poor lad, and do it speedily, and then you will have made noble restitution. You will have given Clarence Grace back his son, and his inheritance; and in the long happy future that lies before you, you will have ample time to wipe out the memory of all this wrong.'

'Why did you not tell me all this before?'

'Because it was no fit argument to use with you, until every other had failed. For a long time I had hopes that you loved this poor Maurice well enough to sacrifice all selfish considerations for his sake. It was not until I found how little you really care for him, that I made up my mind to appeal to your sense of justice, and——'

May swiftly raised her eyes, but, catching the

humorous gleam in the pair bent upon her, lowered them as swiftly; the faint colour dawning, for the first time for many weary months, to her cheek:

‘It is a sin to love any one so well as I love him,’ she said briefly.

‘And yet you have nearly broken his heart, rather than forego your pride. You did not see him as I did. Why, May, he is an older man to-day than his own father, and his head is almost as grey as mine; and that has been all your work.’

What there was in it more pathetic than in all that had gone before, who can say? but at this May’s strained composure gave way to a burst of tears.

‘Will he ever forgive me?’

‘I cannot say for that. In his place I do not think I could; but then he is very soft-hearted, and penitence, you know, goes a long way.’

‘What right have I to be happy? Why should I let him share in the disgrace that is all mine?’

‘You can settle that with him. All I ask is, that, as you value my personal safety, you will not tell him of the argument that I employed to bring you to reason. Beware of letting him ever know that.’

He had reached the door in quest of Nina, when she called him back.

‘Do you think that I *can* live? It would be awful to die now.’

‘I think you can try. It is one of those arts.

that practice makes us pretty expert at, after a time. My dear,' very gravely, 'I will tell you what you *can* do, and in doing it lies half the battle. You can meekly consent to be happy, since plainly it is the will of Heaven that you should be so. What better or humbler way have you of proving your gratitude to God?'

* * * *

If the days that had gone before had been among the heaviest, those that followed on his brilliant *coup* were among the most pleasurable that the doctor could recall.

It was a study, new even to his wide experience, and fraught with ever-increasing interest, to watch the girl in her efforts, earnest with all a woman's heartfelt earnestness, yet feeble as the first faltering steps of a child, to make good her hold on the life that she had well nigh let slip from her grasp; to note the deepening light in the soft eyes, ever wistfully seeking to read in his that the hope held out was no delusive one; the colour that fluttered swiftly to the blanched face at the sound of every footfall that might tell of the approach of him, from whom in her delirium of pain and misery she had held aloof.

But, pleasant study and genial though it was, the doctor was not sorry when at the close of some few days it ended with the arrival of the four wayfarers; each one, even to Clarence Grace himself, evidencing in aspect, that with the accomplishment of their weary pilgrimage a heavy

burden had been lifted from their shoulders for all time.

It was in the grey of the January morning that they made their appearance, before any of the household save himself were astir; consequently Maurice had still some grievous hours of waiting ere he could give utterance to the long-pent raptures and reproaches, which at their one solemn meeting had been hushed to silence, in presence of a power mightier than even the mighty lord of love himself.

At last, however, came the moment when he was to be admitted to see her, but its coming found him with his joyous anticipations sadly damped; for in the interval he had learned the true nature of the argument by which his mistress had been brought to reason, which process he had idly flattered himself had been effected by his own influence alone.

The luckless disclosure came from no other lips than those of the doctor himself, who, unsuspecting that he had a second listener, told over to Wylde the tale of his late experiences with May.

He had reached the climax of his narrative, the point where the sledge-hammer had come down with crushing force, when he was thrown completely off his balance at sight of Maurice, who, in too ecstatic a mood to recollect that he was playing eavesdropper, had from an adjoining room heard every word.

‘Good Heaven, sir! You did not say that to her, did you?’

It was seldom that the doctor was dumb-founded, but for once the thing had unmistakably come to pass.

‘Well! and what if I did?’ he said at last. ‘Why, you graceless young rascal, you are not going to eat me up, are you, for doing all the heavy work, and leaving nothing but the light sentimental business to you?’

‘And I was fool enough to believe that she came back to me of her own free will.’

‘She has been ready to see you these ten minutes,’ put in Wylde. ‘What do you say to finding out for yourself how much is free will, and how much is due to the doctor’s eloquence? Nina bid me tell you not to delay.’

‘May, he says that you have only come back to me to give me an inheritance; that but from a sense of justice, you would rather die than be my wife.’

He was on his knees beside her, all the desperate pain that the doubt had reawakened burning in his haggard eyes; oblivious utterly of the strange dimensions, to which so small a thing as the disclosure he had just listened to, had been monstered at his hands.

‘Is this true? Could you coolly weigh the justice of my cause, while I was starving for one word of love from your lips?’

The reply that came from those lips now was curiously irrelevant; for at the moment justice with all its grave belongings was far distant from the girl’s thoughts, as, with heart and mind and eyes

all bent to the one purpose, she scanned the lines in the sorrow-aged face, the countless silver threads in the thick dark locks, all of which grievous things the same sadly misquoted authority had set down to the account of her own ruthless act.

‘He said that it was I did that.’

And yet, irrelevant as they were, the simple words, the wistful look that made their meaning plain to him, routed heroics on the instant; on the instant brought him back to the level of the bright boy-lover, whose youth had, as he had deemed, received its death-blow, on that same evening when he had heard her promise, that the hand of God alone should have power to sunder them on earth.

With thorough characteristic quickness, he was master of the situation at a glance.

‘It was you that did that, May, and in doing it very nearly broke my heart. Tell me in amends, that you have come to me of your own free accord, and because you love me. Tell me that this wretched inheritance has no more to do in joining us, than it had in putting us apart.’

There was a moment of silence. Then, with that little fluttering bird-like movement so inexpressibly dear to him, May nestled closer to his heart.

‘I came back to you of my own free accord the night my father died. I was thinking very little of your inheritance when I did that.’

* * * *

The snow still lay thick upon the ground when

the old house at Kensington witnessed to a quiet bridal, the closing scene of the eventful drama that had reached such solemn climax within its walls.

May had pleaded for a return to the Tower; but the doctor, steadily backing up Maurice, had overruled the feeble opposition, which was all that she had the heart to make.

‘He needs happiness and change even more than you do, May; and he can get them only in your company. Marry him quickly out of hand, and take him away, and do not bring him back until you have mended all the mischief you have done him. Now, now! do not fill up at every word. I only say that to impress you with a sense of your responsibility; for I have learned that the best way to keep you from slipping through our fingers, is to set you a good stiff task—the stiffer the better, since while you are at it you forget to think of yourself. Marry him forthwith, and do not mind Mrs Grundy. I speak in sober seriousness, when I say that I am still uneasy about you both.’

A very quiet wedding it was, for to all there gathered together the joy that filled each breast was scarce less a sacred thing than sorrow, and might as vainly seek fit utterance in words; and then Maurice carried his young wife off to foreign scenes, that alone they might make friends with the great new happiness, that had re-entered, almost a stranger, into their lives.

And presently the others also made their flit-

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ting ; and just as the opening spring was bringing gladness back to the bright old land from which they had been exiles, found themselves, (with how much of intense thankfulness one among them dared to breathe only in her prayers,) once more gathered within the shelter of their old Tower home.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

AND there, with an ardour that deepened with the deepening summer, Philip Oriel pressed his suit; but pressed it all as unavailing as though his Nina with the southern bloom on her cheek were the habitant of some one of those 'chilly orbs' where the supply of cold hearts is more abundant even than in this of ours.

'Nina, *bellissima*, I shall soon have served for you an apprenticeship, that will put Father Jacob's in the shade. Think how many years I have waited for you—Ay! curl your pretty lip if you will! but what else do you call it but *waiting*, when I have never let any other woman for even a moment take your place?'

To all which, though we by no means seek to deny that it fell in admirably with her ideas of all that a lover's pleading ought to be, Nina made answer as she had done already, when in the old Kensington mansion he had urged that she should be companion bride with May.

'I will marry you when he has been one year

dead, and not till then. He loved me quite as well as you do, and he would never have——'

'He would never have doubted you at any one's bidding. Why not finish as you had begun?'

'Even so.'

Then, seeing a cloud upon the face which, steadily as she might ignore the fact, she yet knew reflected life's best sunshine on her heart, Nina relented.

'Ah, be patient with me! If you had real cause to be jealous, I would not treat you so. Do you not see? do you not *feel* that it is because my poor boy never could teach me to love him, that I must be true now to his memory for a little while?'

Beyond this no one could urge. And so, with fair show of submission, Philip yielded; and instead of wasting his time in vain bemoanings, occupied himself during his period of probation in cultivating a very warm friendship with Clarence Grace, between whom and Nina there by this time subsisted an attachment, the beneficial effect of which on the former, was beginning to be felt by all.

To Wylde the girl had embodied a memory which was all of humiliation and bitterness and defeat, and he had in consequence shrunk from her. To Clarence she brought back the brief season when he was happy with his beautiful young wife, softening, as with a daughter's presence, the anguish with which retrospect was fraught; and as a daughter he welcomed and loved her, to such a point, indeed, as made Wylde once venture

to hazard a doubt, as to whether he would not have greeted her as his son's choice even more eagerly than he had greeted May.

But from this Clarence dissented warmly.

'Not so. Nina is a woman, and I am not sure that I could bear any one merely a woman to have a place in my daily life again; but with May it is different, for I rank her somewhere among the angels. I can never forget her face the first time you brought her to me. Remember that I had been shut up for eighteen years, with visions only to console me; and then you will understand how that child with her fair face and her great pitying blue eyes came upon me like one of God's own angels, and as such she has held her place in my memory ever since. Heaven knows that when I saw her next by her father's death-bed, there were few things I found harder to pardon him, than having cast the blight of his wickedness over her.'

That death-bed scene, too, had not been without its salutary influence; for, from amid much that could serve but to harrow, came to light one fact, the knowledge of which was as balm to the listener's soul.

His mother had had no part in the fell conspiracy; had, on the contrary, mourned his supposed fate with such wild vehemence as to arouse Sir Hugh's fears, and so cause him to give her death-blow to Nina, whom otherwise he could have willingly found it in his heart to spare.

'This accounts for the only thing hitherto in-

explicable in his conduct,' Clarence had said in describing that last interview to his friends, among whom by this time was numbered Philip Oriel. (The doctor's words had early come true, that before long Philip would have divined somewhat of the truth; and seeing that such was unavoidably the case, seeing too, now that the mists through which prejudice had caused her to view him were dispelled, that he was in all things generous and trustworthy, May had consented that the history should be disclosed to him in full.) 'My poor girl and her child might have lived without interference from him, had she been content with his version of the marriage; but when once she threatened to make her story known to my mother, all idea of sparing her further was at an end. My mother seems to have regarded my death somewhat in the light of a judgment on herself, and her grief and remorse he described as terrible; so terrible as to convince him, that should Nina gain access to her, no dread of him, nor no shrinking from the shame of exposure, would be strong enough to deter her from making full reparation to my wife and child. It was then that he hurried to London, and in the hope, as he admitted, to kill mother and child by the one blow, told Nina the story of my death. The child he never was able to trace, nor could he ever gain the faintest clue to the motive that had impelled a stranger, as he of course took Martha to be, to steal it. But what with the thought of its re-appearing, added to every other haunting dread, his life, he

said, was one long fever of apprehension, until the hour when his brain at last gave way.

‘The thought that my mother was a party to my destruction had ever been torture to me. I could comprehend his motives, but that a mother should sell her own flesh and blood was awful. Yet there were times that I could think nothing else; for when years ago I implored him and Cronin to tell me the truth on that head as on every other, I got no answer except some jeering remark from Cronin, that left me free to believe anything I chose. It was worth all that it cost me to forgive him, to experience the peace that has come back to me with the knowledge of that one fact. A man must have reached a sad pass, you will say, when he can thank God that his mother was not a monster; but to such a pass had they brought me that I can say I thank Heaven for it with all my heart.’

Sir Hugh too had himself been the writer of the anonymous letter telling Mrs Stanley of Nina’s death; the spirit that could nerve itself to deal the death-blow, shrinking from the thought of permitting the unhappy girl to be consigned to a pauper’s grave; while at the same time to present himself on the scene unbidden, was to risk the betrayal of all his schemes.

But all this had been told over while our hero’s fate was still in the balance. It is time (that once affirmed) that we should proceed to dispose, in as far as possible a kindred fashion, of the other characters of our tale.

At last the sun arose upon the fervid August day when Philip Oriel's probation ended ; and its setting found Martha in that anomalous frame, half depressed and half exultant, common at such crises to the sex, who justly deem the marrying, and giving in marriage, to be the great, serious business of life ; but restless, the while, with the vague consciousness of coming change, which, to those to whom change implies diminished happiness, is among the least welcome of the sensations, that find unbidden entrance into the human breast.

The last of the young birds had taken wing, and the nest would be henceforth silent and empty. Yet even that might be cheerfully borne, but for the thought that he whom household cares and household pleasures had hitherto held safely enough anchored down, might presently come to miss the brightening influence of more youthful presence in his home ; might presently drift forth in search of the missing element, into more turbid waters, which should bear him away, to Heaven knows what unknown shores, where she might never be able to follow him even in thought.

Had any one at the moment questioned her as to her state of mind, Martha would have asseverated that she was happy, that her cup of contentment was full up to the brim. Nevertheless, at this picture the tears gathered so thickly in her eyes, that when Wylde, returning from a long, solitary ramble, entered the room where she sat, she was utterly unconscious of his presence until he spoke her name.

'What! crying, Mattie! To-day of all days, when we ought to be so happy.'

Martha dried her eyes hurriedly.

'It's ashamed of myself I ought to be, I know, and she only gone away for her own good. She was the light of my heart though for many a day. I can never cease to miss her while I live.'

'Nay, not so bad all out as that, I hope. Do you forget that you will have May and Maurice back shortly? They will compensate you even for the loss of Nina. You will never miss the old home feeling, Martha, when you are with them.'

A great choking knot rising in her throat, warned Martha to be silent.

'May spoke in her last letter about wanting you to make your home with them, did she not?' asked Wylde after a pause.

'Ye—yes.'

'What did you say to that?'

'I—I am no great hand with the pen,' stammered Martha, feebly irrelevant.

'That is no answer to my question. What did you say?'

'I said it would be time enough to settle all that when they had come back.'

'They will be back now in a few weeks' time,' said Wylde curtly; 'what answer are you prepared to make?'

Clearly the time was already close at hand, which at the worst she had only pictured to herself as slowly nearing her. Already the wandering spirit again possessed him, and in craving to follow

its guidance, it was a relief to him to know that she had home and friends awaiting her, that would make her independent of all care for him.

She had come to the age at which women are supposed to have reached a standpoint, whence, whether they have attained to it by the hard path of actual personal experiences, or by a mental process, similar to that by which a certain four-footed moralist reconciled himself to the loss of his grapes, it is assumed that they view the future with sober, philosophic eye. Yet at this, Martha felt that choking knot rise higher in her throat, so that the question put thus importunately, must needs go unanswered for a space.

It is a mistake to conclude, as we are all so apt to do, that the warmest feelings of our nature always find their most congenial home in the bosom of bashful, fair sixteen, or self-possessed one-and-twenty; for there are characters,—and here was one of them,—young with the perennial youth of Nature's self, to whom succeeding years bring no blunting of the affections; whose power to suffer poignantly, whose faculty of keen enjoyment, is more freshly present with them in the autumn, than with the more worldly-bent, in the spring-time of their lives.

‘Martha!’

Something in the tone of his voice, in its sharp, abrupt impatience, made her turn quickly and look up at him, as he stood where he had stationed himself on first entering, behind the tall-backed chair on which she sat.

'You are bright enough, and ready enough, too, to help every one else. Why do you not help me now?'

'I—I—don't understand what you mean.'

'Tut! don't ask me to believe that. You are blind if you do not know what I want to say to you—what if I had said it years ago, when I was first free to say it, would have made me a better man than I am to-day. Will you listen to it now that I am again free to say it, Martha; or do I come altogether too late? Will you be my wife?'

She had risen midway in his speech, and had listened to him with dilated eyes; but at this she dropped back to her seat as suddenly as if he had struck her, and buried her face in her hands.

'No, no, no!'

In the act of advancing a step Wylde stopped short, his brow instantly darkening to such a point as might well justify Nina's assertion, that men of his stamp would fain have women to be slaves.

Had he expected to see this woman fall humbly to her knees, and kiss his hand in token of submission, he could hardly have looked more stormy than he did now, as this passionate denial escaped her lips.

'Why?' he asked at length.

No answer.

'Is it because I once slighted you, for sake of another? They say that no woman can ever forgive that.'

Still no answer.

‘Or because, now that I and my home served our turn, in sheltering other men’s homeless children, we are of no further value in your eyes? It must be that, for—— Ah, I have it now! It is because I am now old and repulsive, that I am to be discarded, for sake of those who can give you a brighter life than you could henceforth have with me.’

But at this Martha raised her head.

‘God forgive you!’ she said hotly.

On the instant the storm-cloud burst, leaving his face lurid enough still, but with a light that had nothing of anger in its gleam.

‘Then you will have me, Mattie?’

The one firm right hand had strength to hold both hers prisoner, but still Martha struggled to be free.

‘No, no!’ she repeated, but very much more faintly now.

‘Why, I ask you? If none of these be your reason, what is it?’

‘You only say it out of pity for me, because——’

‘Because what? Martha, my dear, I am long past the age at which a man cares to go down on his knees to any woman; but yet I could kneel to you now, to ask you to have pity on *me*. I could tell you, if you chose to hear it, how for over twenty weary years, my keenest sorrow has been in the thought, that I threw away the love of the only human creature who ever loved me for myself alone, and whom I once had the power to make happy, as I never could have made the

woman for whom I wasted my life. I do not ask you if you love me now, for I have no right to expect it; but I do entreat you, my dear little home angel, not to desert me, unless you want to punish me far too heavily for all my sins.'

'I am not fit to be your wife. I never was that. At the best of times I knew that I might all as one take leave of my senses, as care for you the way I was the fool to do once; and——'

'*To do once!* Have all my years of waiting,—for I would have come back to you many a day before that letter brought me, had not your own rash act put between us,—have they ended in this, that the love is all a thing buried in the past?'

No softer rose ever bloomed on the cheek of bright eighteen, than flushed to Martha's at this.

'The like of me is not apt to change. I'll think the one way of you, near or far, while I live; but all the same I am not the sort you ought to be asking to marry. I am an old woman now, and——'

'Shall I tell you what you are? You are the bonniest little mortal within the bounds of Ireland; whilst I—what shall I call myself? An old stranded wreck, fit only to be broken up for firewood, or a scathed oak with half its limbs lopped off, or——'

'Don't! I hate to hear you calling yourself names. Sure it's the first lady in the land, and the youngest, might be proud to be your wife, let alone me.'

'The first lady in the land to my mind is

here, and she does not seem one bit proud of the honour. As to names, I will call myself the worst I can think of, until you say yes.'

'Yes' had been said already in every one of the myriad ways in which tears and frank blue eyes are skilled to speak; but with her tongue Martha still had power to dissent.

'It is the same as if a great king was to stoop to a beggar-woman. I read the like in a story-book once.'

'Hush! never let me hear you say that again. It is as if one of God's angels were to come to the rescue of a wandering soul.'

'Heaven knows, I cannot tell what I have ever done to deserve such happiness,' he said, when after a time they had come to talk more equably of the feelings, that had so long lain pent up in the breast of each. 'I have had it in my heart for many a month to say all this; but was half ashamed and half afraid to say it. I took courage to-day through sheer jealousy, when I found you crying because Nina is gone.'

'I was not crying for Nina,' said Martha honestly, scorning in her brave simplicity to hold back any particle of the truth that it must please him to hear her speak. 'I was crying at the thought that by-and-by, when you would miss all the cheery young faces, you would find the place dull and lonesome, and be wanting to go wandering away again. I couldn't answer you at first, when you talked of my making my home with others; and that is why I felt sure that you only

said all the rest out of pity, seeing I never could raise my heart again if you were to go.'

'The children will be all laughing at me,' she added presently, coming back, womanlike, to the affairs of earth, while Wylde's lofty head was still in the clouds; 'dear knows I can't tell how I'll ever be able to face them again.'

But the feelings that may be assumed ordinarily to discompose the tardy Benedick, had no place in Wylde's mind now.

'They will do no such thing. The children are older to-day in sorrow than you and I are, Mattie, and they will know better. If I would admit to being afraid of any one, it would be of Matt Donovan and the doctor; but we can afford to let them laugh if they will.'

* * * * *

No such ordeal, however, had to be endured; for it is on record that Mr Donovan, on having the mighty intelligence conveyed to him by his master, manifested as little inclination as did the latter, to divert himself at the expense of his friends; that, on the contrary, he waxed very genially eloquent when speaking his congratulations to Martha, by way of set-off, as he candidly admitted, for having for a moment believed ill of her 'even when she was seemingly condemnin' herself out of her own mouth.'

To be sure his balmy mental condition was in great measure referable to the fact, that Maurice and May were already on their homeward journey, bringing with them Clarence Grace, who, pining

for the sight of his children, had long since gone to join them abroad ; and that at the prospect of being again with his cherished foster-son, the acid admixture in Matt's composition was evaporating so rapidly, as to inspire the hope, that should he be spared to see greater length of days, he would on reaching a patriarchal term, be found quite as cheery and reasonable as old gentlemen are acknowledged universally to be.

Nor did the 'children' do less than verify Wylde's judgment of them, that they were older in sorrow than he was, and full as little disposed as he, to mock at the good, that fate had held in store for others besides themselves.

But happily sorrow was no longer the order of things when they returned ; for before the old year had quite gone to its close came an heir, not to the conjoint fortunes only, but also to the *name* of Grace, which Maurice, in consideration of his marriage with its heiress, had by that time taken steps to assume. And when they placed his first grandson in Clarence Grace's arms, even he, to whom Despair had once been a familiar presence, felt that there was much left him still to live for ; that compensations, in youth disdained as meagre, come in after years to be accounted nigh as priceless, as were once the brighter things that at first we so reluctantly admitted them to replace.

With the name of which he had been robbed so ruthlessly, he could never, (although May was the one to suggest countless expedients by which, while still averting suspicion, he could safely re-

sume it,) be induced to identify himself again.

‘Teach your children to call me grandfather; and, should I be living when they come to an age to question facts, let them hear so much of my history as I may choose to tell them, from my own lips alone. You may trust me that my version of it shall compromise no one that we wish to spare, while at the same time it shall set curiosity at rest. For the name itself, I would not take it again with a kingdom. It was the curse of my life that I had the strongest claim to it, so that it is but a light sacrifice to forego it now.’

But though willing to forego it for himself, poor Nina’s claim to bear it was not to be ignored, in face of the knowledge that aspersions, though now long forgotten, had once been cast on her fair fame. And so the inscription on the white marble cross was altered, and stood in future, ‘Daughter of Walter Lionel Desmond, and dearly beloved wife of Clarence Bertram Grace;’ the husband little heeding what surmise it might give birth to, so long as even this tardy measure of justice was rendered to the memory of the hapless girl, whose life and honour he had so pitifully failed to guard.

And now, while compensation is still our theme, it strikes us that it is time we should question with which among the many scenes that rise to view we had best close our story, so as to leave on the reader’s mind a somewhat gracious impression, in compensation for his having accompanied us on our rugged way, so patiently and so long.

Shall we attempt to give a portrait of the doctor, genial and glowing on the occasion of his mighty house-warming, when he installed himself in the dwelling which he had erected midway, almost to a hair's breadth, between the Tower and the Chase?

Or shall we lend an ear instead to the last words of Mr Donovan, spoken in reply to Maurice's proposition that the same roof should henceforth cover his foster-son and himself?

'I'd go and welcome, and thank you kindly for askin' me, only it would be a pity to spile two houses with the masther and meself. You see he is the biggest tyrant in the seven parishes, and mortal fond of havin' his own way; and you all give him so much of it among ye, that he'd die for want of crossin' if it wasn't for me. Moreover, I'm not sure but that, cheerin' as they are at odd times, children in the house with me night and day mightn't be too much for my temper; so, thanks to you all the same, I'll hould on as I am to the end. You'll see enough of me though, for so long as the Lord spares me my limbs, I'll make the round of the three houses in the twenty-four hours; and when I am laid up in the chimney corner, it's then I'll be the gentleman in airnest, for you will all be havin' to come to visit me, and I'll be houldin' my *levvy* every other day as grand as the Lord-Liftinant himself.'

Or shall the *tableau* on which the curtain is at last to fall disclose Maurice, seated by his adopted

mother, and with Arthur Wylde's buxom two-year-old heir on his knee?

'It is time I should find another name for you, now that this young gentleman can talk so well for himself. It sounds absurd to hear a grey old *paterfamilias* saying "mother" to such a blithesome little dame as you.'

To which Martha, frightened at the thought from half her blithesomeness, answers hurriedly:

'Never say that again, if you don't want to cut me to the heart. He is a great child, and no mistake; and I am not going to deny but that I am proud of him, if it was only for the sake of the father, for it would do your heart good to see the delight that Arthur takes in him; but all the same he can never be to me what you are. He will never be laying his bit of a head in my lap as you used, and asking for a song or an old story, that you knew off yourself from first to last, and all to hinder me from seeing, that the tears were standing in your eyes with hunger and cold. You and me went through the dint of hardships together, *avie*; and I was young then, when everything counts for double, and that is what ties us to one another so fast. It would be a strange thing, if even my own born child was ever to put you from your place.'

Should we close here, or should our last farewell be given to May, as, with her husband's arm around her, she watches her bright little baby Nina climb to the knee of the white-haired grand-

papa, whose yearning eyes lose half their mournfulness, as he lays down his book in answer to her call?

‘What should I have done, Maurice, if baby had resembled me? I remember the doctor once tried to comfort me with the assurance, that I would be able in time to wipe out the memory of the past; but all that I could do in years to come, would be less than she has done already in her little life. I can never thank God gratefully enough for having given her Nina’s face, and not mine.’

To which, as he bent to kiss away the tears that had gathered in the soft blue eyes, Maurice answered——

But what Maurice said must remain unchronicled, for he has been heard to speak quite often enough in the course of this his history. It is but fitting that he should learn to hold his peace now and henceforth, nor seek to bar a woman from woman’s cherished privilege, of being the one to have the last word.

THE END.



